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THE DAY WILL COME

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"LIKE AND UNLIKE," "THE FATAL THREE,"
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

LONDON
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STATIONERS' HALL COURT

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LONDON :

WOODFALL AND KINDER, PRINTERS,

70 TO 76, LONG ACRE

THE DAY WILL COME.

CHAPTER I.

“And if we do but watch the hour,
There never yet was human power
Which could evade, if unforgiven,
The patient search and vigil long
Of him who treasures up a wrong.”

THEODORE made a tour of the little garden in the summer sundown. It was very small, but its age gave it a superiority over most suburban gardens. There were trees, and hardy perennials that had been growing year after year, blooming and fading, with very little care on the part of successive tenants. The chief charm of the garden to some people might have been its seclusion. There was no possibility of being “overlooked” in this narrow pleasaunce, and over-looking is the curse of

the average garden attached to the average villa. Mr. and Mrs. Jones, taking their ease, or working in their garden in the cool of the evening, are uncomfortably conscious of Mr. and Mrs. Smith eyeing them from the drawing-room windows of next door.

Here the high wall on one side, and the tall horse-chestnuts on the other, made a perfect solitude ; but seclusion on a very small scale is apt to merge into dulness, and it must be owned that the garden of Myrtle Cottage at sundown was about as melancholy a place as the mind of man could imagine. Theodore, contemplating it from the standpoint of Mrs. Danvers' history, her friendlessness, her sense of degradation, wondered that she could have endured that dismal atmosphere for a single summer. And she had lived there for many years ; lived there till weariness must have become loathing.

“ God help her, poor soul,” [he said to himself. “ How she must have abhorred that weeping ash ! How it must have tortured her to see the leaves go and come again year after year, and to know that neither spring nor autumn would better her fate.”

He took down the address of the agent who had

the letting of the house, and left with the intention of seeing him that evening if possible. The landlord was a personage resembling the Mikado, or the Grand Llama, and was not supposed to be accessible to the human vision, certainly not in relation to his house property. The policeman's wife averred that "him and the De Crespignys owned half Camberwell."

The agent was represented to live over his office, which was in no less famous a locality than Camberwell Green, and was likely, therefore, to oblige Mr. Dalbrook by seeing him upon a business matter after business hours. It was not much past seven when Theodore entered the office, where he found the agent extending his business hours so far as to be still seated at his desk, deep in the revision of a catalogue. He was a very genial agent, and he put aside the catalogue immediately, asked Theodore to be seated, and wheeled round his office chair to talk to him.

"Myrtle Cottage. Yes, a charming little box, convenient and compact, a bijou residence for a bachelor with a small establishment. Such a nice garden, too, retired and rustic. If you were think-

ing of taking the property on a repairing lease, the rent would be very moderate, really a wonderfully advantageous occasion for any one wanting a pretty secluded place."

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Adkins, I am not thinking of taking that house or any house. I have come to ask you a few questions about a former tenant, and I shall take it as a favour if you will be so good as to answer them."

The agent looked disappointed, but he put his pen behind his ear, crossed his legs, and prepared himself for conversation.

"Do you mean a recent tenant?" he asked.

"No; the gentleman I am interested in left Myrtle Cottage twenty years ago—nearer five-and-twenty years, perhaps. His name was Danvers."

The agent gave a suppressed whistle, and looked at his interlocutor with increasing interest.

"Oh, you wanted to know something about Mr. Danvers. Was he an acquaintance of yours?"

"He was."

"Humph! He is more than old enough to be your father. He might almost be your grandfather. Do you know him intimately?"

“As intimately as a man of my age can know a man of his age.”

“And position,” added the agent, looking at his visitor shrewdly.

Theodore returned the look.

“I don’t quite follow your meaning,” he said.

“Come, now, sir, if you know anything at all about the gentleman in question you must know that his name is not Danvers, and never was Danvers; that he took Myrtle Cottage under an assumed name, and lived there for nearly ten years under that assumed name; that he never let any of his friends or acquaintances cross his threshold; and that he thought he had hoodwinked me, me a man of the world, moving about in the world, among other men of the world. Why, sir, Mr. Danvers had not paid me three half-years’ rent in notes or gold, as he always paid, and in this office here—before I had found out that he was the rising barrister, Mr. Dalbrook—and before I had guessed the reason of his hole-and-corner style of life.”

“What became of the lady who was called Mrs. Danvers?”

“And who in all probability was Mrs. Danvers,”

said Mr. Adkins. "I have reason to believe that was her name. What became of her? God knows. A servant came to me one August morning with the keys and a half-year's rent—the tenant had given notice to surrender at the Michaelmas quarter, that being the quarter at which he entered upon possession. Mr. and Mrs. Danvers had gone abroad; to Belgium, the woman thought; and as it was their present intention to live abroad, their furniture had all been removed to the Pantehnicon upon the previous day, and the house was empty, and at my disposal."

"Did you hear nothing more of them after that?"

"I heard of him, sir, as all the world heard of him—heard of his marriage with a wealthy young Spanish lady, heard of his elevation to the peerage—but of Mrs. Danvers I never heard a syllable. I take it she was pensioned off, and that she lived—and may have died—on the Continent. Why, there are a lot of sleepy old Flemish towns—I'm a bit of a traveller in my quiet way—which seem to have been created for that purpose."

"Is that all you can tell me about your tenants,

Mr. Adkins? I am not prompted by idle curiosity in my inquiries. I have a very strong motive——”

“Don’t trouble yourself to explain, sir. I know nothing about Mr. or Mrs. Danvers which I have any desire to hold back—or which I am under any obligation to keep back. My business relations with the gentleman never went beyond letting him Myrtle Cottage, which I let to him without a reference, on the strength of a twelve month’s rent in advance, and a deuce of a hurry he was in to get into the place. As for Mrs. Danvers, you may be surprised to hear that I never saw her face. I’m not a prying person, and as the rent was never overdue, I had no occasion to call at the house. But I did see some one who had a strong bearing upon the lady’s life, and a very troublesome customer that person was.”

“Who was he?”

“No less an individual than her husband. A man dashed into this office one winter afternoon, a little after dusk, and asked me if I had let a house to a person called Danvers? I could see that he had been drinking, and that he was in a state of strong excitement; so I answered him shortly

enough, and I kept him well between myself and the door, so as to be able to pitch him out if he got troublesome. He told me that he'd just come from Myrtle Cottage, that he had been refused admittance there, although the woman who lived there was his wife. He wanted to know if the house had been taken by her, or by the scoundrel who passed himself off as her husband? If it had been taken in her name it was his house, and he would very soon let them know that he had the right to be there. I told him that I knew nothing about him or his rights; that my client's tenant was Mr. Danvers, and that there the business ended. He was very violent upon this, abused the tenant, talked about his own wrongs and his wife's desertion of him, asked me if I knew that this man who called himself Danvers was an impostor, who had taken the house in a false name, and who was really a beggarly barrister called Dalbrook; and then from blasphemy and threatening he fell to crying, and sat in my office shivering and whimpering like a half-demented creature, till I took compassion upon him so far as to give him a glass of brandy, and send my office lad out with him to put him into a cab."

“ Did he tell you his name or profession ? ”

“ No, he was uncommonly close about himself. I asked him if the lady's name was really Danvers, and if he was Mr. Danvers ; but he only stared at me in a vacant way with his drunken eyes. It was hopeless trying to get a straight answer from him about anything. Heaven knows how he got home that night, for he wouldn't tell the office boy his address, and only told the cabman to drive to Holborn. ‘ I'll pull him up when I get there,’ he said. He may have been driven about half the night, for all I can tell.”

“ Was that all you ever saw or heard of him ? ”

“ All I ever saw, but not all I ever heard. Servants and neighbours will talk, you see, sir, and I happened to be told of three or four occasions—at considerable intervals—at which my gentleman made unpleasantness at Myrtle Cottage. He would go there wild with drink—I believe he never went when he was sober—and would kick up a row. If he wanted to get his wife away from the life she was leading he would have gone to work in a different manner ; but it's my opinion he wanted nothing of the kind. He was savage and vindictive in his

cups, and he wanted to frighten her and to annoy the man who had tempted her away from him. But he was a poor creature, and after blustering and threatening he would allow himself to be thrust out of doors like a stray cur."

"What kind of a man did he look? A broken-down gentleman?"

"Yes, I should say he had been a gentleman once, but he had come down a longish way. He had come down as low as drink and dissipation can bring a man. Altogether I should consider him a dangerous customer."

"A man capable of violence—of crime even?"

"Perhaps! A man who wouldn't have stopped at crime if he hadn't been a white-livered hound. I tell you, sir, the fellow was afraid of Mr. Dalbrook, although Mr. Dalbrook ought to have been afraid of him. He was a craven to the core of his heart."

"What age did you give him?"

"At the time he came to me I should put him down at about six-and-thirty."

"And that is how many years ago?"

"Say four-and-twenty—I can't be certain to a

year or so. It wasn't a business transaction, and I haven't any record of the fact."

"Was he a powerful-looking man?"

"He was the remains of a powerful man—he must have been a fine man when he was ten years younger—a handsome man, too—one of those fair-complexioned, blue-eyed, aquiline-nosed men who set off good clothes—the kind of man to do justice to a rig out from a fashionable tailor. He was a wreck when I saw him, but he was the wreck of a handsome man."

"And you take it that he was particularly vindictive?"

"He was as vindictive as a cur can be."

"And was his anger strongest against the lady, do you suppose, or against the gentleman?"

"Decidedly against the gentleman. He was full of envy and hatred and all uncharitableness towards Mr. Dalbrook. He affected to think contemptuously of his talents, and to belittle him in every way, while he was bursting with envy at his growing success. He was jealous and angry as a husband, no doubt; but he was still more jealous and still angrier as a disappointed man against a suc-

cessful man. He was as venomous as conscious failure can be. And now, sir, that I have spoken so freely about this little domestic drama, which was all past and done with twenty years ago, and in which I only felt interested as a man of the world, now may I ask your name, and how you come to be so keenly interested in so remote an event?"

"My name is Dalbrook," replied Theodore, taking out his card and laying it upon the agent's desk.

"You don't mean to say so! A relation of Lord Cheriton's?"

"His cousin, a distant cousin, but warmly attached to him and—his. The motive of my inquiry need be no secret. A dastardly murder was committed last summer in Lord Cheriton's house——"

"Yes, I remember the circumstances."

"A seemingly motiveless murder; unless it was the act of some secret foe—foe either of the man who was killed—or of his wife's father, Lord Cheriton. I have reason to know that the young man who was killed had never made an enemy. His life was short and blameless. Now, a malignant cur, such as the man you describe—a man possessed by

the devil of drink—would be just the kind of creature to assail the strong man through his defenceless daughter. To murder her husband was to break her heart, and to crush her father's hopes. This man may have discovered long beforehand how my cousin had built upon that marriage—how devoted he was to his daughter, and how ambitious for her. Upon my soul I believe that you have given me the clue. If we are to look for a blind unreasoning hatred—malignity strong enough and irrational enough to strike the innocent in order to get at the guilty—I do not think we can look for it in a more likely person than in the husband of Mrs. Danvers.”

“Perhaps not,” said Mr. Adkins, keenly interested, yet dubious. “But, granted that he is the man, how are you to find him? It is about four-and-twenty years since he stood where you are standing now, and I have never set eyes on him from that day to this—close upon a quarter of a century. I can't tell you his calling, or his kindred, the place where he lived, or even the name he bore, with any certainty. Danvers may have been only an assumed name—or it may have been

his name. There's no knowing—or rather there's only one person likely to be able to help you in the matter, and that is Lord Cheriton."

"It would be difficult to question him upon such a subject."

"Of course it would; and I don't suppose that even he has taken the trouble to keep himself posted in the movements of that very ugly customer. Having shunted the lady he wouldn't be likely to concern himself about the gentleman."

"A quarter of a century," said Theodore, too thoughtful to give a direct answer. "Yes, it must be very difficult to trace any man after such an interval; but if that man went to Cheriton Chase he must have left some kind of trail behind him, and it will go hard with me if I don't get upon that trail. I thank you, Mr. Adkins, for the most valuable information I have obtained yet, and if any good comes of it you shall know. Good night."

"Good night, sir. I shall be very glad to aid in the cause of justice. Yes, I remember the Cheriton Chase murder, and I should like to see the mystery cleared up."

CHAPTER II.

“ Upon a tone,
A touch of hers, his blood would ebb and flow,
And his cheek change tempestuously . . .
But she in these fond feelings had no share ;
Her sighs were not for him ; to her he was
Even as a brother—but no more.”

AFTER that conversation with the house-agent, the idea that he had found the clue to the Cheriton Chase mystery took root in Theodore Dalbrook's mind. Taking as his starting-point the notion of a deadly hatred wreaking itself in an indirect revenge, there seemed no more likely figure for the *rôle* of avenger than that of the wronged and deserted husband. The one startling improbability in this view of the case was the long interval between the husband's appearance at Myrtle Cottage and the date of the murder ; but even this difficulty Theodore was able to account for upon the hypothesis of a gradual perversion, a descent from vice to crime, as the man's nature hardened under the corrupting

influence of a profligate life, while the old festering sore grew into a malignant canker, under the lash of misery. He had seen in that great seething cauldron of London life men whose countenances bore the stamp of a degradation so profound that the most ferocious crime might seem the normal outcome of their perverted natures. He could imagine how the broken-down gentleman, steeped in drink, and embittered by the idea of wrongs which had been the natural consequence of his own misconduct, had sunk step by step upon the ladder of vice, till he had arrived at that lowest deep where the dreams of men are stained with blood and darkened by the shadow of the hangman. He could imagine such a man brooding over his wrongs for long years, nursing his jealous wrath as the one touch of manliness that survived in him—until some newspaper description of the Dalbrook and Carmichael wedding reminded him of the bitter contrast between his own lot and that of his rival, and, lashed into sudden fury, he set out upon his murderous errand, hardly caring whom he murdered so long as he could hurt the man he hated.

The very fact that Mrs. Danvers' husband had

been described as a craven, made the idea of his guilt more likely. Only a coward would have chosen such a revenge; only a coward could have stretched out his hand from the darkness to kill a man who had never injured him. The crime was the crime of a coward or a madman; and this man, brutalized by drink, may have been both madman and coward.

Here at least was a man closely associated with James Dalbrook's life, and having good cause to hate him. In the darkness surrounding the murder of Godfrey Carmichael this was the first flash of light.

And having arrived at this point Theodore Dalbrook saw himself face to face with a new and seemingly insurmountable difficulty. To follow this clue to the end, to bring the crime home to the husband of Lord Cheriton's cast-off mistress, was to expose the history of the great man's earlier years to the world at large, to offer up a reputation which had hitherto been stainless as a rich and savoury repast to that carrion brood—consisting of almost everybody—which loves to feast upon garbage. How the evening newspapers would revel in the details of such a story—what denunciations—what

over the weakness of a strong man's life. How the contents bills would bristle with appetizing headings, how the shrill-voiced newsboys would yell their startling particulars, their latest developments of the Cheriton Chase Scandal.

This must all inevitably follow upon the discovery of the murderer, if the murderer were indeed the injured husband. There could be no possible escape from that glare of publicity, that swelling symphony of slander. From the moment the law laid its hand upon the criminal the case would pass beyond individual control, and individual interests and reputations would become as nought. Justice would have to do its work, and in the doing of it must needs afford the usual fine opportunity to the newspapers. Theodore thought with horror of such humiliation coming upon Lord Cheriton, and through him upon Juanita, who loved her father with a reverential affection, and who was intensely proud of his character and position. He thought of gentle Lady Cheriton, who adored her husband, and who doubtless would be made miserable by the knowledge that his first love had been given to another woman, whom he had loved well enough to sacrifice honour

for the sake of that illicit love. What agony to that single-minded, trusting creature to find that dark spot upon her husband's past, and to know that the daughter's happiness had been blighted because of the father's sin.

With these considerations in his mind it seemed to Theodore that it would be better to halt on the very threshold of discovery ; and yet there was the appalling thought of further possibilities in the way of crime—of a madman's revenge carried a stage further, a madman's pistol aimed at the defenceless mother or the unconscious child. What was he to do ? Was there no alternative between inaction and such action as must speedily set in motion the machinery of the law, and thus deprive him of all free will in the future conduct of the case ?

Yes, there was an alternative course. If he were once assured of the identity of the assassin, it might be in his power to lay hands upon him, and to place him under such circumstances of control in the future as would ensure Juanita's safety, and render any further crime impossible. If the man were mad, as Theodore thought more than likely, he might be quietly got into an asylum. If he were still master

of his actions he might be got abroad, to the remotest colony in the Antipodes. The knowledge of his crime would be a hold over him, a lever which would remove him to the uttermost ends of the earth, if need were. This would be an illegal compromise, no doubt—unjustifiable in the eye of the law—but if it ensured Juanita's safety, and saved her father's character, the compromise was worth making. It was, indeed, the only way by which her security and her father's good name could be provided for.

To arrive at this result he had to find the man who had appeared in Mr. Adkins' office about four-and-twenty years ago, and of whose subsequent existence he, Theodore, had no knowledge.

"I must begin at the other end," he told himself. "If that man was the murderer, he must have been seen in the neighbourhood. It is not possible that he could have come to the place, and watched for his opportunity, and got clear off after the deed was done without being seen by human eyes."

And yet there remained the fact that the local policeman and a London detective had both failed in obtaining the faintest trace of a suspicious-looking stranger, or indeed of any stranger, male or

female, who had been observed in the neighbourhood of Cheriton before or after the murder; there remained the fact that a large reward had been offered without resulting in one scrap of information bearing upon the subject. How could he hope, in the face of these facts, to trace the movements of a man whose personal appearance was unknown to him, and who had come and gone like a shadow?

“I can but try, and I can but fail,” he told himself. “Knowing what I know now, I cannot remain inactive.”

It may be that he had caught something of the fiery eagerness which consumed Juanita, that in his ardent desire to be worthy of her regard, to waste his life in her service, he had become, as it were, inoculated with the spirit of his mistress, and hoped as she hoped, and thought as she thought.

With the beginning of the Long Vacation he went to Dorchester, but this time not alone. He took his friend Cuthbert Ramsay with him, as a visitor to the grave old house, in the grave old town.

His sisters often made a complaint against him that he never introduced any of his college friends to them—that whereas the sisters of other University

men were rich in the acquaintance of Charlies and Algernons, and Freds and Toms, who were produceable at tennis parties and available for picnics at the shortest notice, they were restricted to the youths of Dorchester and a horizon bounded by the country houses of the immediate neighbourhood. Remembering these reproaches, and seeing that his friend Ramsay was obviously pining for rest and country air, Theodore suggested that he should occupy the bachelor's room in Cornhill as long as he could venture to stop away from hospitals and lectures and scientific investigations.

“You want a long fallow, Cuthbert,” he said, “and you couldn't have a better lotus island than Dorchester. There's not an excitement or a feverish sensation to be had within twenty miles, and then I really want to make you known to my cousin, Lord Cheriton. He is a very clever man—an all-round man—and he would be interested in you and all that you are doing.”

“I shall be proud of knowing him. And then there is your cousin, Lady Carmichael. I am deeply interested in her, without having ever seen her face, and when I do see her——”

“ You will say she is one of the loveliest women you ever saw in your life, Cuthbert. I have no doubt of that. You will see her beauty under a cloud, for she is not one of those women who begin to get over the loss of a husband as soon as their crape gets rusty ; but her beauty is all the more touching on account of the grief that separates her from all other women—even from her past self. I sometimes look at her and wonder if this sad and silent woman can be the Juanita I once knew ; the light-hearted, spontaneous girl, a buoyant creature, all impulse and caprice, fancy and imagination.”

“ You may be sure that I shall admire her, and you may be sure I shall not forget that there is some one whose admiration has a deeper root than the lust of the eye and the fancy of the moment.”

Theodore would not affect to misunderstand him. It was not possible that he could have talked of his cousin in the freedom of friendship without having revealed his secret to his friend.

“ My dear fellow,” he said with a sigh, “ mine is a hopeless case. You will know that it is so when you see Juanita and me together. Her mother said to me on the first day of this year, ‘ If ever she

comes to care for anybody it will be some new person ;' and I have not the least doubt that her mother was right. Her first love was her playfellow, the companion of her girlhood. A woman cannot have two such loves. Her second attachment, if she ever make one, will be of a totally different character."

"Who knows, Theodore? A woman's heart is to be measured by no callipers that I know of; it is subject to no scientific test; we cannot say it shall give this or that result. It may remain cold as marble to a man through years of faithful devotion, and then, in an instant, the marble may change to a volcano, and hidden fires may leap out of that seeming coldness. 'Nil desperandum' should be the motto of all inventors—and of all lovers."

Dorchester, and especially the old house in Cornhill, received Mr. Ramsay with open arms. Harrington was in the dejected state of a young man who has been rudely awakened from youth's sweetest delusion. Fooled and forsaken by Juliet Baldwin he had told himself that all women are liars, and was doing all in his power to establish his reputation as a woman-hater. In this temper of mind he was not averse from his own sex, and he welcomed his

brother's friend with unaffected cordiality, and was evidently cheered by the new life which Ramsay's vivacity brought into the quiet atmosphere of home.

The sisters were delighted to do honour to a scientific man, and were surprised, on attacking Mr. Ramsay at dinner with the ease and aplomb of *confrères* in modern science, to discover one of two things—either that he knew nothing, or that they knew very little. They were at first inclined to the former opinion, but it gradually dawned upon them that their own much-valued learning was of a very elementary character, and that their facts were for the most part wrong. Chastened by this discovery, they allowed the conversation to drift into lighter channels, and never again tackled Mr. Ramsay either upon the broad and open subject of evolution, or the burning question of the cholera bacillus. They were even content to leave him to the enjoyment of his own views upon spontaneous generation and the movement of glaciers, instead of setting him right upon both subjects, as they had intended in the beginning of their acquaintance.

“He is remarkably handsome, but horribly dogmatic,” Sophia told her brother, “and I’m afraid he

belongs to the showy, shallow school which has arisen since the death of Darwin. He would hardly have dared to talk as he did at dinner during Darwin's lifetime."

"Perhaps not, if Darwin had been omnipresent."

"Oh, there is a restraining influence in the very existence of such a man. He is a perpetual court of appeal against arrogant smatterers."

"I don't think you can call a man who took a first class in science a smatterer, Sophy. However, I'm sorry you don't like my friend."

"I like him well enough, but I am not imposed upon by his dogmatism."

The two young men drove to Milbrook Priory on the following day, Theodore feeling painfully eager to discover what change the last few months had made in Juanita. She had been in Switzerland, with Lady Jane and the baby, living first at Grindelwald, and later in one of those little villages on the shores of the lake of the forest cantons, which combine the picturesque and the dull in a remarkable degree—a mere cluster of chalets and cottages at the foot of the Rigi, facing the monotonous beauty of the lake, and the calm grandeur of snow-capped

mountains, which shut in that tranquil corner of the earth and shut out all the busy world beyond it. Nowhere else had Juanita felt that deep sense of seclusion, that feeling of being remote from the din and press of life.

And now she was again at the Priory. She had settled down there in her new position, as widow and mother, a woman for whom all life's passionate story was over, who must live henceforward for that new life growing day by day towards that distant age of passion and of sorrow through which she had passed suddenly and briefly, crowding into a month the emotions of a lifetime. There are women who have lived to celebrate their golden wedding who in fifty years of wedlock have not felt half her sum of love, and who in losing the companion of half a century have not felt half her sum of grief. It is the capacity for loving and suffering which differs in different people, and weighed against that Time counts but little.

She received her cousin with all her old friendliness. She was a little more cheerful than when last they met, and he saw that the new interest of her life had done good. Lady Jane was at Swanage,

and Juanita was alone at the Priory, though not without the expectation of company a little later in the year, as the sisters and their husbands were to be with her before the first of October, so that the expense of pheasant-breeding might not be altogether wasted.

“You must be here as much as you can in October, Theodore,” she said, “and help me to endure Mr. Grenville and Mr. Morningside. One talks nothing but sport, and the other insists upon teaching me the science of politics.”

She received Cuthbert Ramsay with a serious sweetness which charmed him. Yes, she was verily beautiful among women, exceptionally beautiful. Those southern eyes shone star-like in the settled pallor of her face, and her whole countenance was etherealized by thought and grief. It touched the stranger to see how she struggled to put away the memory of her sorrow and to receive him with all due hospitality—how she restrained herself as she showed him the things that had been a part of her dead husband’s existence, and told him the story of the old house which had sheltered so many generations of Carmichaels.

Lady Cheriton had been lunching at the Priory, where she came at least twice a week to watch her grandson's development in all those graces of mind and person which marked his superiority to the average baby. She came all the oftener because of the difficulty in getting Juanita to Cheriton.

"My poor child will hardly ever visit us," she told Theodore, as they sauntered on the lawn while Juanita was showing Mr. Ramsay the pictures in the dining-room. "She has an insurmountable horror of the house she was once so fond of; and I can't wonder at it, and I can't be angry with her. I have seen how painfully her old home affects her, so I don't worry her to come to us often. I make a point of getting her there once in a way in the hope of overcoming her horror of the place as time goes by; and I have even gone out of my way to make changes in the furniture and decorations, so that the rooms should not look exactly the same as they looked in her fatal honeymoon; but I can see in her face that every corner of the house is haunted for her. Once when she had been calm and cheerful with me for a whole afternoon, walking about the garden and going from room to room, she flung her-

self into my arms suddenly, sobbing passionately. 'We were so happy, mother,' she said, 'so happy in this fatal house.' We must bear with her, poor girl. God has given her a dark lot."

Theodore had seen an anxious, questioning look in Juanita's eyes from the beginning of his visit, and he took the first opportunity of being alone with her, while Lady Cheriton entertained Mr. Ramsay with an exposition of the merits of her grandson, who was calmly slumbering in a hammock on the lawn, unconscious of her praises, and half smothered in embroidered coverlets.

"Have you found out anything?" she asked, eagerly, as soon as they were out of ear-shot.

"Yes, I believe I have really come upon a clue, and that I may ultimately discover the murderer; but I can give you no details as yet—the whole thing is too vague."

"How clever of you to succeed where the police have utterly failed. Oh, Theodore, you cannot imagine how I shall value you—how deeply grateful——"

"Stop, Juanita, for Heaven's sake don't praise me. I may be chasing a Will-o'-the-Wisp. I don't

suppose that any experienced detective would take up such a clue as I am going to follow—only you have set me to do this thing, and it has become the business of my life to obey you.”

“ You are all that is good. Pray tell me everything you have discovered—however vague your ideas may be.”

“ No, Juanita, I can tell you nothing yet. You must trust me, dear. I am at best only on the threshold of a discovery. It may be long before I advance another step. Be content to know that I am not idle.”

She gave an impatient sigh.

“ It is so hard to be kept in the dark,” she said. “ I dream night after night that I myself am on the track of his murderer—sometimes that I meet him face to face—oh, the hideous palid face—the face of a man who has been hanged and brought to life again. It is always the same kind of face—the same dull livid hue—though it differs as to features, though the man is never the same. You cannot imagine the agony of those dreams, Theodore. Lay that ghost for me, if you can. Make my life peaceful, though it can never be happy.”

“Never is a long word, Nita. As the years go by your child’s love will give life a new colour.”

“Yes, he is very dear. He has crept into my heart, little nestling unconscious thing—knowing nothing of my love or my sorrow, and yet seeming to comfort me. I sometimes think my darling’s spirit looks out of those clear eyes. They seem so full of thought—of thought far beyond human wisdom.”

Theodore could see that the work of healing was being done, slowly but surely. The gracious influence of a new love was being exercised, and the frozen heart was reviving to life and warmth under the soft touch of those baby fingers. He saw his cousin smile with something of the old brightness as she stood by while Cuthbert Ramsay dandled the little lord of Carmichael Priory in his great strong arms, smiling down at the tiny pink face peeping out of a cloud of lace and muslin.

“Any one can see that Mr. Ramsay is fond of children,” said Lady Cheriton approvingly, as if a liking for infants just short-coated were the noblest virtue of manhood.

“Oh, I am fond enough of the little beggars,”

answered Cuthbert, lightly. "All the gutter brats about St. Thomas's know me, and hang on to my coat-tails as I go by. I like to look at a child's face—those old shrewd London faces especially—and speculate upon the life that lies before those younglings, the things those eyes are to see, the words those lips are to speak. Life is such a tremendous mystery, don't you know—one can never be tired of wondering about it. But this fellow is going to be very happy, and a great man in the land. He is going to belong to the new order, the order of rich who go through life shoulder to shoulder with the poor; the redressers of wrongs, the adjusters of social levels."

"I hope you are not a Socialist, Mr. Ramsay?" said Lady Cheriton, with an alarmed air.

"Not much; but I acknowledge that there are points where my ideas touch the boundary line of Socialism. I don't want impossibilities. I have no dream of a day when there shall be no more millionaires, no great patrons of art or great employers of labour, but only a dead level of small means and shabby dwellings, and sordid colourless lives. No, there must be butterflies as well as ants—if it were

only that the ants may have something pretty to look at. What I should like to see is a stronger bond of friendship and sympathy between the two classes—a real knowledge and understanding of each other between rich and poor, and the twin demons Patronage and Sycophancy exorcised for ever and ever.”

The tea-tables were brought out upon the lawn by this time ; Sir Godfrey Carmichael was carried off by his nurse ; and the two young men sat down with Lady Cheriton and her daughter under the tree beneath which Juanita and her husband had sat on that one blissful day which they had spent together at the Priory as man and wife. They seemed a very cheery and pleasant quartette as they sat in the sultry afternoon atmosphere, with the level lawn and flower-beds stretching before them, and the wide belt of old timber shutting out all the world beyond. Cuthbert Ramsay was the chief talker, full of animal spirits, launching the wildest paradoxes, the most unorthodox opinions. The very sound of his strong full voice, the very ring of his buoyant laugh, were enough to banish gloomy thoughts and sad memories.

Lady Cheriton was delighted with this new acquaintance ; first because he was dexterous in handling a baby ; next on the score of general merits. She was not a deeply read person, but she had a profound respect for culture in other people ; and she had an idea that a scientific man was a creature apart, belonging to a loftier world than that which she and her intellectual equals inhabited. Theodore had told her of his friend's claims to distinction, his hard work in several cities, and seeing this earnest worker boyish and light-hearted, interested in the most frivolous subjects, she was lost in wonder at his condescension.

She begged him to go to Cheriton with Theodore at the earliest opportunity—an invitation which he accepted gladly.

“ I have long wished to know Lord Cheriton,” he said.

The two young men left soon after tea. Cuthbert's high spirits deserted him at the Priory gates, and both men were thoughtful during the homeward drive.

“ Well, Cuthbert, what do you think of my cousin, now that you have seen her ? ” Theodore asked, when he had driven the first mile.

“ I can only agree with you, my dear fellow. She is a very lovely woman. I think there could hardly be two opinions upon that point.”

“ And do you think—as I do—that it is hopeless for any man to spend his life in worshipping her? Do you think her heart is buried with her dead husband? ”

“ Only as Proserpine was buried with Pluto. It is not in human nature for so young a woman to wear her weeds for a lifetime. The hour of revival must come sooner or later. She has too bright and quick an intellect to submit to the monotony of an inconsolable sorrow. Her energy expends itself now in the desire to avenge her husband's death. Failing in that, her restless spirit will seek some new outlet. She is beginning to be interested in her child. As that interest grows with the child's growth, her horizon will widen. And then, and then, when she has discovered that life can still be beautiful, her heart will become accessible to a new love. The cure and the change, the awakening from death to life, may be slower than it is in most such cases, because this woman is the essence of sincerity, and all her feelings lie deep. But the awakening

will come—you may be sure of that. Wait for it, Theodore, possess your soul in patience.”

“You can afford to be philosophical,” said the other, with a sigh. “You are not in love!”

“True, my friend. No doubt that makes a difference.”

CHAPTER III.

“And one, an English home—gray twilight poured
On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
Softer than sleep—all things in order stored,
A haunt of ancient Peace.”

THEODORE and his friend betook themselves to Cheriton Chase on the following Friday, for that kind of visit which north country people describe as “a week end.” They carried their portmanteaux in that portion of the dog-cart which is more legitimately occupied by a leash of spaniels or Irish setters, and they arrived in the golden light of the afternoon, just when that sunk lane approaching the west gate was looking its loveliest. Hart’s-tongue and rocky boulder, the great brown trunks of the oaks and the polypodium growing amidst their cloven branches were all touched with sun-gleams, while evening shadows lay soft and cool upon the tall flowering grasses in the meadows on either side of the deep gully.

“That is Mrs. Porter’s cottage,” said Theodore, indicating the gate-keeper’s house with a turn of his whip towards the end of the lane where the clustered chimneys showed through a gap in the trees.

Ramsay had been introduced to Miss Newton, and had constituted himself honorary surgeon and medical adviser to that lady and all her humble friends. He had been invited to the tea parties in Wedgewood Street, and had interested himself in the young woman called Marian, and in her probable identity with the lodge-keeper’s missing daughter, for which reason he had a keen desire to make the lodge-keeper’s acquaintance.

“From your account of the lady she must be a piece of human adamant,” he said. “I like to tackle that kind of individual. I’ve met a few of them, and I’m happy to say that if I haven’t been able to melt them I’ve generally succeeded in making them smart. I should enjoy exhibiting my moral aquafortis in the case of this lady. I shall get you to accompany me in a morning call upon her while we are at Cheriton.”

“My dear Cuthbert, I would sooner call, unin-

vited and without credentials, upon the Archbishop of Canterbury. I don't forget how she froze me when I tried to be friendly with her last New Year's Day. She was more biting than the north-east wind that was curdling the ponds in the Park."

"A fig for her bitingness. Do you suppose I mind? If you won't take me to her I shall go by myself. A character of that kind has an irresistible fascination for me. I would go a hundred miles any day to see a bitter, bad woman."

"She is bitter enough, but she may not be bad. She may be only a creature who mistakes fanaticism for religion, who has so misread her Bible that she thinks it her bounden duty to shut her heart against a beloved child rather than to forgive a sinner. I believe she is to be pitied rather than blamed, odious as she may seem."

"Very likely. A hard heart, or an obstinate temper, is a disease like other diseases. One ought to be sorry for the sufferer. But this woman has a strong character, anyhow, for good or evil, and I delight in studying character. The average man and woman is so colourless that there is infinite relief in the study of any temperament which

touches the extreme. Think how delightful it would be to meet such a man as Iago or Othello—picture to yourself the pleasure of watching the gradual unfolding of such a mind as Iachimo's, and consider how keen would be one's interest in getting to the bottom of a woman like that poisoning step-mother of Imogen's whose name Shakspeare does not take the trouble to record. So this is the lodge—charming Early English cottage—real rustic English, not Bedford Parkish—half-timbered, thatched gables, dormers like eyes under bushy eyebrows, walls four feet thick, lattices two hundred years old. It might be the very cottage in which Grandmamma Wolf waited for the dear, plump little girl, with chubby cheeks shining like the butter in her basket, and with lips as sweet as her honey. Poor little girl!"

The servant-maid ran down the steps to open the gate, and as the wheels stopped an upper casement swung suddenly open, and a woman's face appeared in the golden light, a pale, wan face, whose most noticeable expression was a look of infinite weariness—

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"Anæmic," said Cuthbert, as they drove in at

the gate. "Decidedly anæmic. I should suspect that woman——"

"Of what?"

"Of being a vegetarian," answered Cuthbert gravely. "But I'll call to-morrow, and find out all about her."

Lord Cheriton received his kinsman's friend with marked cordiality, and seemed to enjoy his freshness and spontaneity. They talked of Cambridge—the Cambridge of forty years ago and the Cambridge of to-day—and they talked of the continental schools of medicine, a subject in which the lawyer was warmly interested. There were no other visitors expected before September, when three old friends of Lord Cheriton's were to shoot the partridges. In October there was to be a large party for the pheasant shooting, which was the chief glory of Cheriton Chase. There had been no shooters at the Chase last year, and Lord Cheriton felt himself so much the more constrained to hospitality.

"You fellows must come in October, when we have our big shoot," he said, but Cuthbert Ramsay told him that he must be at work again in London before the end of September.

Cuthbert was much impressed by the master of Cheriton Chase, and the grave and quiet dignity with which he wore success that might have made a weaker man arrogant and self-assertive. It would seem as if scarcely anything were wanting to that prosperous career. Yet Cuthbert saw that his host was not free from a cloud of care. It was natural, perhaps, that he should feel the tragedy of his son-in-law's death as a lasting trouble, not to be shuffled off and forgotten when the conventional period of mourning was past.

Theodore had some private talk with his cousin on the first evening of his visit, walking up and down the terrace, while Cuthbert was looking at the books in the library, under Lady Cheriton's guidance. He had it fully in his mind that the time must come when he would be obliged to take Lord Cheriton into his confidence, but he felt that time was still far off. Whenever the revelation came it must needs be infinitely painful to both, and deeply humiliating to the man whose hidden sin had brought desolation upon his innocent daughter, and untimely death upon the man whose fate had been linked with hers. It was for his dishonour, for the

wrongs inflicted by him, that those two had made expiation.

No, the time to be outspoken—the time to say in the words of the prophet—“Thou art the man,” had not yet come. When it should come he would be prepared to act resolutely and fearlessly; but in the meantime he must needs go on working in the dark.

He remembered his last conversation with Lord Cheriton on that subject—remembered how Cheriton had said that he believed Godfrey Carmichael incapable of a dishonourable action—incapable of having behaved cruelly to any woman. Had he who pronounced that judgment been guilty of dishonour—had he been cruel to the woman who sacrificed herself for him? There are so many degrees in such wrong-doing! There is the sin of impulse: there is the deliberate betrayal, the coldly planned iniquity, the sin of the practised seducer who has reduced seduction to a science, and who has no more heart or conscience than a machine. There is the sin of the generous man, who finds his feet caught in the web of circumstance, who begins, innocently enough, by pitying a neglected wife, and ends by

betraying the neglectful husband. Theodere gave his kinsman credit for belonging to the category of generous sinners. Indeed, the fact that he had lived aloof from the world for many years, sharing the isolation of the woman who loved him, was in itself evidence that he had not acted as a villain; yet it was possible that when the final hour came, the hour for breaking those illicit bonds, the rupture may have been in somewise cruel; and the remembrance of that cruelty might be a burden upon the sinner's conscience at this day. Such partings can never be without cruelty. The fact that one sinner is to marry and begin a new life, while the other sinner is to finish her days in a dishonoured widowhood, is in itself a cruelty. She may submit, as to a fate which she foresaw dimly, even in the hour of her fall—but she would be more than human if she did not think herself hardly used by the man who forsakes her. Nothing he can do to secure her worldly comfort or to screen her from the world's disdain will take the sting out of that parting. The one fact remains that her day is done. He has ceased to care for her, and he has begun to care for another.

“Nothing has occurred since I was here to throw

any new light upon the murder, I suppose ? ” Theodore said quietly, as they smoked their cigars, walking slowly up and down in the summer night.

“ Nothing.”

“ Did her ladyship tell you that I have met a girl in London, whom I believe to be no other than Mercy Porter ? ”

“ Yes, she told me something about that fancy of yours, for I take it to be nothing more than a fancy. The world is too wide for you and Mercy Porter to meet so easily. What was your ground for identifying her with the lodge-keeper’s girl ? ”

“ The lodge-keeper’s girl ! ” There was something needlessly contemptuous in the phrase, it seemed to Theodore : a studied disdain.

“ It was she herself who suggested the idea, by her inquiries about Cheriton. She confessed to having come from this part of the world, and she has an air of refinement which shows that she does not belong to the peasant class. She is a very good pianiste—plays with remarkable taste and feeling ; and Lady Cheriton tells me that Mercy had a talent for music. I have no doubt in my own mind that this young woman is Mercy Porter, and I think her

mother ought to go to London and see her, even if she should not think fit to bring her back to the home she left."

"Mrs. Porter is a woman of peculiar temper. The girl may be happier away from her."

"Yes, that is very likely—but the mother ought to forgive her. The penitent sinner, whose life for the last few years has been blameless, ought to feel that she is pardoned and at peace with her mother. I tried to approach the subject, but Mrs. Porter repelled me with an almost vindictive air; and I do not think it would be any good for me to plead for my poor friend again. If you or Lady Cheriton would talk to her——"

"I will get my wife to manage her. It is a matter in which a woman would have more influence than you or I. In the meantime, if there is anything I can do to make Mercy Porter's life easier, I shall be very glad to do it, for her father's sake."

"You are very good; but she is not in want, and she seems content with her lot."

"What is she doing for a living?"

"Her employment is fine needlework. She lives in one small back room in Lambeth, and has only

one friend in the world, and that friend happens to be a lady who once lived in this house."

"A lady who lived in this house!" exclaimed Lord Cheriton. "Who in Heaven's name do you mean?"

"Miss Newton, who was governess to Miss Strangway nearly forty years ago."

"What brought Miss Newton and you together?"

"That is rather a long story. I took some trouble to find the lady in order to settle one question which had disturbed my cousin Juanita since her husband's death."

"What question?"

"She was haunted by an idea that Sir Godfrey's murderer was one of the Strangways, and his murder an act of vengeance by some member of that banished race. It was in order to set this question at rest for ever that I took some trouble to hunt out the history of Squire Strangway's two sons and only daughter. I traced them all three to their graves, and have been able to convince Juanita that they and their troubles were at rest long before the time of her husband's murder."

“What could have put such a notion into her head?”

“Oh, it came naturally enough. It was only a development of Churton’s idea of a vendetta.”

“She was always full of fancies. Yes, I remember she used to say the house was haunted by the ghosts of the Strangways. I really think she had a dim idea that I had injured that spendthrift race in buying the estate which they had wasted. And so to satisfy Juanita you took the trouble to ferret out Miss Newton? Upon my word, Theodore, your conduct is more Quixotic than I could have believed of any young man in the nineteenth century. And pray by what means did you discover the *ci-devant* governess?”

Theodore told the story of his visit to the scholastic agencies, his journey to Westmorland, and his friendly reception by Miss Newton in her Lambeth lodgings.

“She was much attached to Miss Strangway, who was her first charge, and near enough to her own age to be more of a companion than a pupil,” he said, “and she spoke of her melancholy fate with great tenderness.”

“It was a melancholy fate, was it? I know she made a runaway-marriage; but in what way was her fate sadder than the common destiny of a spendthrift’s daughter—a girl who has been reared in extravagance and self-indulgence, and who finds herself face to face with penury in the bloom of her womanhood?”

“That in itself would be sad, but Miss Strangway’s destiny was sadder than that—commonplace enough, no doubt—only the old story of an unhappy marriage and a runaway wife.”

He could not help looking at Lord Cheriton at this point, thinking how this common story of an unfaithful wife must needs remind his kinsman of that other story of another wife which had influenced his early manhood. He must surely have a sensitive shrinking from the discussion of any similar story.

“She ran away from her husband! Yes, I remember having heard as much. What did Miss Newton know about her—beyond that one fact?”

“Very little—only that she died at Boulogne nearly twenty years ago. This fact Miss Newton heard from the lips of the man for whom Mrs.

Darcy left her husband. I had been at Boulogne a week or so before I saw Miss Newton, and I had hunted there for any record of Mrs. Darcy's death, without result. But this is not very strange, as it is quite likely that she lived at Boulogne under an assumed name, and was buried in that name, and so lies there, in a foreign land, dissevered for ever from any association with her name and kindred."

"There are not many of her kindred left, I take it," said Lord Cheriton. "There seems to have been a blight upon that race for the last half-century. But, now, tell me about someone in whom I am more interested—the girl you believe to be Mercy Porter. I should be very glad to make her life happier, and so I told her ladyship. You, Theodore, might be the intermediary. I would allow her a hundred a year, which would enable her to live in some pretty country place—in Devonshire or Cornwall, for instance, in some quiet sea-coast village where no one would know anything about her or her story."

"A hundred a year! My dear Cheriton, that is a most generous offer."

“No, no, there is no question of generosity. Her father was my friend, and I was under some obligation to him. And then the girl was my wife’s *protégée*; and, finally, I can very well afford it. I am almost a childless man, Theodore. My grandson will be rich enough when I am gone, rich enough to be sure of a peerage, I hope, so that there may be a Baron Cheriton when I am in the dust.”

“You are very good. I believe this girl has a great deal of pride—the pride of a woman who has drunk the cup of shame, and she may set herself against being your pensioner; but if the matter can be arranged as you wish she may yet see happier days. I think the first thing to be done is to reconcile mother and daughter. Mrs. Porter ought to go up to London——”

“To see Miss Newton’s *protégée*? On no account. I tell you Mrs. Porter is a woman of strange temper — God knows how bitterly she might upbraid her daughter. And if the girl is proud, as you say she is, the mother’s reproaches would goad her to refuse any help from me or my wife. No Theodore, the longer we keep mother and

daughter apart, the better for Mercy's chances of happiness."

"But if this young woman should refuse to confess her identity with Mercy Porter it will be impossible to benefit her."

"That difficulty may be easily overcome. You can take my wife to see her. She was always fond of my wife."

"And you will leave the mother out of the question. That seems rather hard upon her."

"I tell you, Theodore it, is better to leave the mother out of the question. She never acted a mother's part to Mercy—there was never any real motherly love—at least that was Lady Cheriton's opinion of the woman, and she had ample opportunity for judging, which, of course, I had not. If you want to help the daughter, keep the mother aloof from her."

"I daresay you are right, and I shall of course obey you implicitly," said Theodore, inwardly reluctant.

He had an exalted idea of maternal love, its obligations and privileges, and it seemed to him a hard thing to come between a penitent daughter

and a mother whose heart ought to be full of pity and pardon. Yet he remembered his brief interview with Mrs. Porter, and he could but own to himself that this might be an exceptional case.

CHAPTER IV.

“And from that time to this I am alone,
And I shall be alone until I die.”

THEODORE and his friend strolled across the Park on Saturday afternoon in the direction of the west gate, Cuthbert Ramsay intent upon carrying out his intention of introducing himself to Mrs. Porter, and Theopore submitting meekly to be led as it were into the lion's den.

“You have no idea what hard stuff this woman is made of,” he said ; and then he told Ramsay what Lord Cheriton had said to him about Mrs. Porter on the previous evening, and how the daughter's life was to be made happy, if possible, without reference to the mother.

“The harder she is the more I am interested in making her acquaintance,” replied Cuthbert. “I don't care a jot about commonplace women, were they as lovely as Aphrodite. I go to see this soured

widow as eagerly as Romeo scaled Juliet's balcony. Did his lordship ever tell you what it was that soured the creature, by the way? That kind of hardness is generally in somewise the result of circumstance, even where there is the adamant quality in the original character."

"I never heard any details about the lady's past life; only that her husband was in the merchant navy, upon the India and China line—that he died suddenly and left her penniless—that she was a lady by birth and education, and had married somewhat beneath her. I have often wondered how my cousin, as a barrister, came to be intimate with a captain in the merchant service."

They were at the gates of the Park by this time, and close to the rustic steps which led up to Mrs. Porter's garden. It was one of those tropical days which often occur towards the end of August, and the clusters of cactus, dahlias in the old-fashioned border and the tall hollyhocks in the background, made patches of dazzling colour in the bright white light, against which the cool grays of the stone cottage offered repose to the eye. One side of the cottage was starred with passion-flowers, and on the other

the great waxen chalices of the magnolia showed creamy white against the scarlet of the trumpet ash. It was the season at which Mrs. Porter's hermitage put on its gayest aspect, the crowning feast of bloom and colour before the chilling breath of autumn brought rusty reds and pallid grays into the picture.

The two young men heard voices as they approached the steps, and on looking upward, Theodore saw the curate and his wife standing on the little grass-plot with Mrs. Porter. There could hardly be a better opportunity for approaching her, as she was caught in the act of receiving visitors, and could not deny herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Kempster were young people, and of that social temperament which will make friends under the hardest conditions. Mr. Kempster belonged to the advanced Anglican school, and ministered the offices of the Church as it were with his life in his hand, always prepared for the moment when he should come into collision with his Bishop upon some question of posture or vestments. He had introduced startling innovations into the village church, and hoped to be able to paraphrase the boast of Augustus, and to say that he found Cheriton Evan-

gelical and left it Ritualistic. Needless to say, that while he gratified one-half of his congregation he offended the other half, and that old-fashioned parishioners complained bitterly of his "gewgaws fetched from Aaron's old wardrobe or the flamen's vestry." Mrs. Kempster had work enough to do in smoothing down the roughened furs of these antediluvians, which smoothing process she effected chiefly by a rigorous system of polite afternoon calls, in which no inhabitant of the parish was forgotten, and an occasional small expenditure in the shape of afternoon tea and halfpenny buns toasted and buttered by her own fair hands. She was a bright, good-tempered little woman, whom her husband generally spoke of as a "body."

The Kempsters had just accepted Mrs. Porter's invitation to tea, and were making an admiring inspection of her garden before going into the cottage.

"I don't believe any one in Cheriton parish has such roses as you, Mrs. Porter," said the curate's wife, gazing admiringly at the standard gloire de Dijon, which had grown into gigantic dimensions in the middle of the grass-plot. "I never saw

such a tree ; but then, you see, you give your mind to your garden as none of us can."

"I have very little else to think about, certainly," said Mrs. Porter.

"Except Algernon's sermons. I know you appreciate them," cried Mrs. Kempster, in her chirruping little voice. "Algernon says no one listens as attentively as you do. 'She quite carries me away sometimes with that rapt look of hers,' he said the other day. I am half inclined to feel jealous of you, Mrs. Porter. Oh, here is Mr. Dalbrook. How d'ye do, Mr. Dalbrook?"

Mrs. Kempster shook hands with Theodore before he could approach Mrs. Porter, but having got past this vivacious lady, he introduced Cuthbert Ramsay to the mistress of the house.

"My friend is a stranger in the neighbourhood, Mrs. Porter," he said, "and he was so struck by the beauty of your cottage yesterday that he set his heart upon being introduced to you, and I was really obliged to bring him."

"My cottage is not generally considered a show place, Mr. Dalbrook," she answered, coldly, turning her dull gray eyes full upon Theodore with a look

which made him uncomfortable, "but I shall be very happy to show it to your friend—and his lordship's friend, I conclude."

"I don't know if I dare claim that distinction, Mrs. Porter," answered Cuthbert, in his cheerful resonant voice. "This is my first visit to the Chase; and if Lord Cheriton has received me with open arms it is only because I am his kinsman's friend."

Theodore introduced the stranger to the Kempsters, who welcomed him eagerly, as one who came fraught with the interests and excitements of the outer world.

"May I ask if our man has got in for Southwark?" demanded Mr. Kempster. "His lordship would be sure to get a telegram after the polling."

"I blush to say that I forgot all about the election, and didn't ask after the telegram," replied Cuthbert. "When you say 'our man,' you mean——"

"The Conservative candidate. I conclude you belong to us."

"Again I blush to say I don't belong to you the least little bit. I am an advanced Liberal."

Mr. Kempster sighed, with a sigh that was almost a groan.

"A destroyer and disestablisher of everything that has made the glory of England since the days of the Heptarchy," he said, plaintively.

"Well, yes, [there have been a good many false gods toppled over, and a good many groves of Baal cut down, since the Saxon Kings ruled over the Seven Kingdoms. You don't want Baal and the rest of them stuck up again, do you, Mr. Kempster?"

"Mr. Ramsay, there are times and seasons when I would to God I could wake up in the morning and find myself a subject of King Egbert. Yes, when I see the rising tide of anarchy—the advancing legions of unbelief—the Upas Tree of sensual science," said Kempster, slipping airily from metaphor to metaphor, "I would gladly lay hold upon all that was most rigid and uncompromising among the bulwarks of the past. I would belong to the Church of Wolsey and A'Becket. I would lie prostrate before the altar at which St. Augustine was celebrant. I would grovel at the feet of Dunstan."

"Ah, Mr. Kempster, we can't go back. That's

the plague of it, for romantic minds like yours. I am afraid we have done with the picturesque in religion and in everything else. We are children of light—of the fierce white light of science and common sense. We may regret the scenic darkness of mediævalism, but we cannot go back to it. The clouds of ignorance and superstition have rolled away, and we stand out in the open, in the searching light of truth. We know what we are, and whom we serve.”

At Mrs. Porter's invitation they all followed her into the cottage parlour, where the tea-table stood ready, and much more elegantly appointed than that modest board which the curate's wife was wont to spread for her friends. Here there appeared both old china and old silver, and the tea which Mrs. Porter's slender white hands dispensed was of as delicate an aroma as that choice Indian pekoe which Theodore occasionally enjoyed in Lady Cheriton's boudoir.

Mrs. Porter placed herself with her back to the window, but Cuthbert's keen eyes were able to note every change in her countenance as she listened to the conversation going on round her, or on rare

occasions took part in it. He observed that she was curiously silent, and he was of opinion that Theodore's presence was in some manner painful to her. She addressed him now and then, but with an effort which was evident to those studious eyes of Cuthbert Ramsay's, though it might escape any less keen observer.

The conversation was of politics and of the outer world for the first ten minutes, and was obviously uninteresting to Mrs. Kempster, who fidgeted with her teaspoon, made several attempts to speak, and had to wait her opportunity, but finally succeeded in engaging Theodore's attention.

"Have you seen Lady Carmichael lately, Mr. Dalbrook?" she inquired.

"I saw her three days ago."

"And how did you find her? In better spirits I hope? She hardly ever comes to Cheriton now, and her old friends know very little about her. I am told she has a horror of the place, though she was once so fond of it. Poor thing, it is only natural! You found an improvement in her I hope?"

"Yes, I saw at least the beginning of improve-

ment," answered Theodore. "Her child gives a new interest to her life."

"What a blessing that is! And by-and-by she will meet some one else who will interest her even more than her baby, and she will marry again. She is too young to go on grieving for ever. Don't you think so, Mrs. Porter?"

"Yes, I suppose she will forget sooner or later. Most women have a faculty for forgetting."

"Most women, but not all women," said Cuthbert, with his earnest air, which made the commonest words mean more from him than from other men. "I do not think you would be the kind of woman to forget very quickly, Mrs. Porter."

She was in no hurry to notice this remark, but went on pouring out tea quietly for a minute or two before she replied.

"There is not much room in my life for forgetfulness," she said, after that protracted pause. "So without being in any way an exceptional person, I may lay claim to a good memory."

"She remembers her daughter, and yet memory does not soften her heart," thought Theodore. "With her memory means implacability."

He looked round the room, in the flickering light of the sunshine that crept in between the bars of the Venetian shutters. He had not expected ever to be sitting at his ease in Mrs. Porter's parlour after that unpromising conversation upon the first day of the year. He looked round the room, thoughtfully contemplative of every detail in its arrangement which served to tell him what manner of woman Mrs. Porter was. He was not a close student of character like Ramsay ; he had made for himself no scientific code of human expression in eye and lip and head and hand ; but it seemed to him always that the room in which a man or a woman lived gave a useful indication of that man's or that woman's mental qualities.

This room testified that its mistress was a lady. The furniture was heterogeneous—shabby for the most part, from an upholsterer's point of view, old-fashioned without being antique ; but there was nevertheless a *cachet* upon every object which told that it had been chosen by a person of taste, from the tall Chippendale bureau which filled one corner of the room, to the solid carved oak table which held the tea tray. The ornaments were few,

but they were old china, and china of some mark from the collector's point of view; the draperies were of Madras muslin, spotless, and fresh as a spring morning. Theodore noticed, however, that there were no flowers in the vases, and none of those scattered trifles which usually mark the presence of refined womanhood. The room would have had a bare and chilly aspect, lacking these things, if it had not been for a few pictures, and for the bookshelves, which were filled with handsomely bound books.

"You have a nice library, Mrs. Porter," he said, somewhat aimlessly, as he took a cup of tea from her hands. "I suppose you are a great reader?"

"Yes, I read a great deal. I have my books and my garden. Those make up my sum of life."

"May I look at your books?"

"If you like," she answered coldly.

He went about the small, low room—so low, with its heavily-timbered ceiling, that Cuthbert Ramsay's head almost touched the crossbeams—and surveyed the collections of books in their different blocks. Whoever had so arranged them had exercised both taste and dexterity. Everything in the room fitted

like a Chinese puzzle, and everything seemed to have been adapted to those few pieces of old furniture—the walnut-wood bureau, the oak table, and the old Italian chairs. The books were theological or metaphysical for the most part, but among them he found Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus," "Past and Present," and "French Revolution;" Bulwer's mystical stories, and a few books upon magic, ancient and modern.

"I see you have a fancy for the black art, Mrs. Porter," he said lightly. "One would hardly expect to find such books as these in the Isle of Purbeck."

"I like to know what men and women have built their hopes upon in the ages that are gone," she answered. "Those dreams may seem foolishness to us now, but they were very real to the dreamers, and there were some who dreamed on till the final slumber—the one dreamless sleep."

This was the longest speech she had made since the young men entered her garden, and both were struck by this sudden gleam of animation. Even the large grey eyes brightened for a few moments, but only to fade again to that same dull, unflinching

gaze which made them more difficult to meet than any other eyes Theodore Dalbrook had ever looked upon. That unflinching stare froze his blood ; he felt a restraint and an embarrassment which no other woman had ever caused him.

It was different with Cuthbert Ramsay. He was as much at his ease in Mrs. Porter's parlour as if he had known that lady all her life. He looked at her books without asking permission. He moved about with a wonderful airiness of movement which never brought him into anybody's way. He fascinated Mrs. Kempster, and subjugated her husband, and impressed everybody by that strong individuality which raises some men a head and shoulders above the common herd. It would have been the same had there been a hundred people in the room instead of five.

Mrs. Porter relapsed into silence, and the conversation was carried on chiefly by Cuthbert Ramsay and the Curate, until Mrs. Kempster declared that she must be going, lest the children should be unhappy at her absence from their evening meal.

"I make a point of seeing them at their tea," she said ; "and then they say their prayers to me

before nurse puts them to bed—so prettily, and Laura sings a hymn with such a sweet little voice. I am sure she will be musical by-and-by, if it is only by the way she stands beside the piano and listens while I sing. And such an ear as that child has, as fine as a bird's. You must come and hear her sing 'Abide with me,' some day, Mrs. Porter, when you drop in to take a cup of tea."

Mrs. Porter murmured something to the effect that she would be pleased to enjoy that privilege.

"Ah, but you never come to tea with me, though I am always asking you. I'm afraid you are not very fond of children."

"I am not used to them, and I don't think that children like people who are out of the habit of associating with them," answered Mrs. Porter deliberately. "I never know what to say to a child. My life has been too grave and too solitary for me to be fit company for children."

The Curate and his wife took leave and went briskly down the steps to the lane, and Theodore made a little movement towards departure, but Cuthbert Ramsay lingered, as if he were really loth to go.

“I am absolutely in love with your cottage, Mrs. Porter,” he said; “it is an ideal abode, and I can fancy a lady of your studious habits being perfectly happy in this tranquil spot.”

“The life suits me well enough,” she answered, icily, “perhaps better than any other.”

“You have a piano yonder, I see,” he said, glancing through the half-open door to an inner room with a latticed window, beyond which a sunlit garden on a bit of shelving ground sloped upwards to the edge of the low hill-side, the garden vanishing into an upland meadow, where cows were seen grazing against the evening light. This second sitting-room was more humbly furnished than the parlour in which they had been taking tea, and its chief feature was a cottage piano, which stood diagonally between the lattice and the small fireplace.

“You too are musical, I conclude,” pursued Cuthbert, “like little Miss Kempster.”

“I am very fond of music.”

“Might we be favoured by hearing you play something?”

“I never play before people. I played tolerably once, perhaps—at least my master was good enough

to say so. But I play now only snatches of music, by fits and starts, as the humour seizes me."

She seated herself by the casement with a resigned air, as much as to say, "Are these young men never going?" Her long, thin fingers busied themselves in plucking the faded leaves from the pelargoniums which made a bank of colour on the broad window ledge.

"You were at home at the time of the murder, I suppose, Mrs. Porter?" said Cuthbert, after a pause, during which he had occupied himself in looking at the water-colour sketches on the walls, insignificant enough, but good of their kind, and arguing a cultivated taste in the person who collected them.

"I am never away from home."

"And you heard and saw nothing out of the common course—you have no suspicion of any one?"

"Do you suppose if I had it would not have been made known to the police immediately after the murder? Do you think I should hoard and treasure up a suspicion, or a scrap of circumstantial evidence till you came to ask me for it?" she said, with suppressed irritation.

“Pray forgive me. I had no idea of offending you by my question. It is natural that any one coming to Cheriton Chase for the first time should feel a morbid interest in that mysterious murder.”

“If you had heard it talked about as much as I have you would be as weary of the subject as I am,” said Mrs. Porter, rather more courteously. “I have discussed it with the local police and the London police, with his Lordship, with the doctor, with Mr. Dalbrook’s father, with Lady Carmichael, with Lady Jane Carmichael, these having all a right to question me—and with a good many other people in the neighbourhood who had no right to question me. I answer you as I answered them. No, I saw nothing, I heard nothing on that fatal night—nor in the week before that fatal night, nor at any period of Lady Carmichael’s honeymoon. Whoever the murderer was he did not come in a carriage and summon my servant to unlock the gate for him. The footpath through the Park is open all night. There was nothing to hinder a stranger coming in and going out—and the chances were a thousand to one, I fancy, against his being

observed—once clear of the house. That is all I know about it.”

“And as an old resident upon the property you have no knowledge of any one who had a grudge against Lord Cheriton or his daughter—such a feeling as might prompt the murder of the lady’s husband as a mode of retaliation upon the lady or her father?”

“I know no such person, and I have never considered the crime from such a point of view. It is too far-fetched a notion.”

“Perhaps. Yet where a crime is apparently motiveless the mainspring must be looked for below the surface. Only a far-fetched theory can serve in such a case.”

“Shall I tell you what I think about the murder, Mr. Ramsay?” asked Mrs. Porter, looking up at him suddenly, and fixing him with those steady grey eyes.

“Pray do.”

“I think that no one upon God’s earth will ever know who fired that shot. Only at the Day of Judgment will the murderer stand revealed, and then the secret of the crime and the motive will

stand forth written in fire upon the scroll that records men's wrongs and sorrows and sins. You and I, and all of us, may read the story there, perhaps, in that day when we shall stand as shadows before the great white throne."

"I believe you are right, Mrs. Porter," answered Cuthbert quietly, holding out his hand to take leave. "A secret that has been kept for more than a year is likely to be kept till we are all in our graves. The murderer himself will be the one to tell it, perhaps. There are men who are proud of a bloody revenge, as if it were a noble deed. Good day to you, Mrs. Porter, and many thanks for your friendly reception."

He held the thin, cold hand in his own as he said this, looking earnestly at the imperturbable face, and then he and Theodore left the cottage.

"Well, Cuthbert, what do you think of that woman?" asked Theodore, after they had passed through the gate, and into the quiet of the long glade where the fallow deer were browsing in the fading day.

"I think a good deal about her, but I haven't

thought out my opinion yet. Has she ever been off her head ? ”

“Not to my knowledge. She has lived in that house for twenty years. I never heard that there was anything wrong with her mentally.”

“I believe there is something, or has been something very wrong. There is madness in that woman’s eye. It may be the indication of past trouble, or it may be a warning of an approaching disturbance. She is a woman who has suffered intensely, and who has acquired an abnormal power of self-restraint. I should like to know her history.”

“My God, Cuthbert,” cried Theodore, grasping him by the arm, and coming suddenly to a standstill, “do you know what your words suggest—to what your conclusion points? The murder of my cousin’s husband was an act of vengeance, or of lunacy. We have made up our minds about that, have we not? The detective, Juanita, you and I, everybody. We are looking for some wretch capable of a blindly malignant revenge, or for homicidal madness, with its unreasoning thirst for blood ; and here, here at these gates is a woman whom you

suspect of madness, a woman who could have had access to the gardens at any hour, who knew the habits and hours of the servants, who would know how to elude observation."

"My dear fellow, you are going a great deal too far. Who said I suspected that unhappy woman of homicidal madness? The brain disease I suspect in Mrs. Porter is melancholia, the result of long years of self-restraint and solitude, the not unfrequent consequence of continuous brooding upon a secret grief."

CHAPTER V.

“My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirred,
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those days I heard.”

THAT suggestion of Cuthbert Ramsay's of latent madness in the lodge-keeper came upon Theodore like a flash of lurid light, and gave a new colour to all his thoughts. It was in vain that his friend reminded him of the wide distinction between the fury of the homicidal lunatic and the settled melancholy of a mind warped by misfortune. After that conversation in the park he was haunted by Mrs. Porter's image, and he found his mind distracted between two opposite ideas; one pointing to the man who had claimed Mrs. Danvers as his wife, the deserted and betrayed husband of James Dalbrook's mistress; the other dwelling upon the image of this woman living at his kinsman's gate, with an existence which was unsatisfactorily explained by the scanty

facts which he had been able to gather about her former history.

He recalled her conduct about her daughter, her cold and almost vindictive rejection of the penitent sinner ; her stern resolve to stand alone in the world.

Was that madness, or the consciousness of guilt, or what ? It was conduct too unnatural to be accounted for easily, consider it how he might. He had heard often enough of fathers refusing to be reconciled with erring or disobedient children. The flinty hardness of the father's heart has become proverbial. But an unforgiving mother seems an anomaly in nature.

He determined upon confiding Ramsay's opinion and his own doubts to Lord Cheriton without delay.

Whatever abnormal circumstances there had been in Mrs. Porter's history, her benefactor was likely to be acquainted with them ; and if those circumstances had affected her intellect it was vital that he should be made aware of the fact before evil of any kind could arise.

He contrived an after dinner stroll upon the terrace with his kinsman as upon the previous even-

ing, and entered upon the subject without loss of time.

“Ramsay and I took our afternoon tea with Mrs. Porter,” he said.

“Indeed! How did that come about? She is not a sociable person in a general way, or accessible to strangers.”

“It was to gratify a fancy of Ramsay’s that I went there. He admired her cottage and was interested in her history, and took it into his head that she was a woman of exceptional character.”

“He was not far wrong there, I believe. Mrs. Porter is a very hard nut to crack. I have never been able to fathom her.”

“And yet with your knowledge of her previous history you must have the safest clue to her character.”

“I don’t know about that. There is nothing exceptional in her history—and there is much that is exceptional in her character, as your friend says. Pray what was the result of his observation of the lady in the leisure of afternoon tea-drinking?”

“He believed that he saw the traces of madness in her countenance and manner; madness either

past, present, or impending. He could not decide which."

There was not light enough upon the terrace to show Theodore any change in his cousin's countenance, but the movement of Lord Cheriton's hand as he took the cigar from his mouth, and the sudden slackening of his pace were sufficient indications of troubled thought. It could hardly be pleasant for him to hear so melancholy a suggestion about the pensioner whom he had established in comfort at his gate, intending that she should enjoy his bounty for all the days of her life.

"Upon what does your friend base this fantastical notion?" he asked angrily.

"Upon physiological and psychological evidence. You can question him, if you like. It appears to me that you ought to know the truth."

"I have no objection to hear anything he may have to say, but it is very unlikely I shall be influenced by him. These young men, who are by way of being savants, are full of crochets and theories. They look at every one as Darwin looked at a Virginia creeper or a cowslip, with a preconceived notion that they must find out something

about him. I believe Mrs. Porter, with her calm, impassible nature, is much better able to reckon up your friend Ramsay than he is able to come to a correct opinion about her."

"I should like you to discuss the question with him, at any rate," said Theodore. "The horror of last year's calamity is a reason you should have nobody about the estate whom you cannot trust."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that while you have madness at your gate you may have murder in your house."

"Theodore! You cannot be so cruel as to associate that unhappy woman with Godfrey Carmichael's death?"

"God knows! That murder has to be accounted for somehow. Can you, as Juanita's father, know rest or peace till it has been accounted for? I could not, in your place."

"I hope you do not think it necessary to teach me my duty to my daughter," said Lord Cheriton coldly; and Theodore felt that he had said too much.

His cousin addressed him upon some indifferent subject a minute or so afterwards, when he had

lighted a fresh cigar, and his manner resumed its usual friendliness. There was no further mention of Mrs. Porter that night, but on Sunday Lord Cheriton walked home from church with Cuthbert Ramsay, and questioned him as to his impressions about the lodge-keeper.

“Theodore has exaggerated the significance of my remark,” explained Cuthbert. “I take it Mrs. Porter’s case is one of slight aberration brought on by much brooding upon troubles, real or imaginary. If my power to diagnose is worth anything, her mind has lost its balance, her thoughts have lost their adjusting power. She is like a piece of mechanism that has got out of square, and will only work one way. You may hardly consider that this amounts to madness, and I may have done wrong in speaking of it: only were Mrs. Porter concerned in my existence, I should feel it incumbent on me to watch her; and I recommend you to have her watched, so far as it can be done without alarming or annoying her.”

“I will do what I can. I will get another opinion from a man of long experience in mental cases. I have an old friend in the medical profes-

sion, a specialist, who has made mental disease the study of his life. He will give me any advice I want."

"You cannot do better than get his opinion of Mrs. Porter, if you are interested in her welfare."

"I am interested in all who are dependent upon me, and in her especially, on account of old associations."

Lady Carmichael drove over to Cheriton after luncheon, upon one of those Sunday visits which she paid from time to time in deference to her father, albeit she could never approach the house without pain. She came in the useful family landau, which had carried the Misses Carmichael to tennis parties, dinners, and dances, before they married, and which now conveyed the nurse and baby on their visits to Cheriton. She came for what Lady Cheriton called a long afternoon, and she was received in the library, which was now the most used room in the house. No one cared to occupy that fatal drawing-room; and although it was always accessible, and there was a faint of daily occupation, its cold elegance was for the most part untenanted.

“And over all there hung a cloud of fear.”

To-day, for the first time, Theodore discovered numerous alterations in the arrangement of pictures and furniture in the hall. He had promised Cuthbert to show him the portraits of the Strangways, and most particularly that picture of the Squire's three children, painted nearly forty years before; but he found that this picture, among others, had been removed, and that a fine Rhodian plate occupied its place on the dark oak panelling.

He noticed the fact to his cousin.

“I am sorry to miss the family group,” he said.

“It was a really interesting picture.”

“Interesting to you perhaps, who knew the history of the race,” answered Lord Cheriton, “but very uninteresting to a stranger. I think I've made an improvement over there. That plate is a splendid bit of colour, and lights up a dark corner. But that was not my motive. I wanted to make such trifling alterations as would change the aspect of the hall for Juanita, without any ostensible refurnishing. I have done the same thing in the library. The changes there are slight, but the room is not as it was when she and her husband occupied it.

“I should like to show Ramsay the Strangway portraits, if they are get-at-able.”

“They are not just at present. The canvases were rotting, and I have sent them to London to be lined. You can show them to your friend by-and-by, when I get them back.”

Mr. Ramsay's thoughts seemed a long way from the Strangway portraits this afternoon, although he had expressed a curiosity as to the lineaments of that luckless race. He was out in the garden—in Lady Cheriton's rose garden—with Juanita and her son, and was giving further proofs of his adaptability to infantile society. The grandmother was of the party, looking on with profound admiration at that phase of awakening intellect which is described as “taking notice.” It was held now as an established fact that the infant Godfrey James Dalbrook took notice, and that his notice dwelt with especial favour upon Cuthbert Ramsay.

“I think it must be because you are so tall and big,” said Juanita lightly. “He feels your power, and he wants to conciliate you.”

“Artful little beggar! No, that is much too low a view. There is a magnetic affinity between us—

love at first sight. When babies do take a fancy they are thoroughly in earnest about it. Loafing about in the New Cut sometimes, studying human nature from the Saturday night point of view, I have had a poor woman's baby take a fancy to me—a poor little elfin creature, a year old perhaps, and not half so big as this bloated aristocrat, a sour-smelling baby which would give you *mal au cœur*, Lady Carmichael; and the wretched little waif would hook on to my elephantine finger and cleave to me as if I were its mother. Oh, how sorry I have felt for such a baby—with the pure starry eyes of infancy shining in the flabby withered face that has grown old for want of cold water and fresh air! For such infancy and for stray dogs I have suffered acutest agonies of pity—and yet I have done nothing—only pitied and passed on. That is the worst of us. We can all pity, but we don't act upon the divine impulse. You may be sure the Levite felt very sorry for the wounded traveller, though he did not see his way to helping him."

This was one of Cuthbert's tirades, which he was wont to indulge in when he found himself in congenial society; and Juanita's society was particu-

larly congenial to him. He felt as if no other woman had ever sympathised with him or understood him—and he gave her credit for doing both. Never had he felt so happy in the society of any woman, as he felt in this sunlit garden to-day, among the roses which were just now blooming in a riotous luxuriance, the branching heads of standards top-heavy with great balls of blossom, swaying gently in the summer wind.

He had expected to see her a gloomy creature, self-conscious in her grief—but the child's little fingers had loosened her heart strings. If she was not gay, she was at least able to endure gaiety in others. She listened to the young man's rhapsodies and paradoxes with a gentle smile; she admired her mother's roses. She cast no shadow upon the quiet happiness of the summer afternoon, that tranquil contentedness which belongs to the loveliness of Nature, and which makes a blessed pause in the story of human passion and human discontent. It was one of those summer afternoons which make one say to oneself, "Could life be always thus what a blessed thing it were to live!" and then the sound of evening bells breaks the spell, and the

shadows creep across the woods, and it is dinner time, and all that halcyon peace is over.

How lovely she looked in her simply-made black gown, with its closely-fitting bodice and straight flowing skirt, of that thick lustreless silk which falls in such statuesque folds! The plain little white crape cap seemed in perfect harmony with that raven hair and pure white forehead. She was unlike any other woman Cuthbert Ramsay had ever known. There was not one touch of society slang, nor of the society manner of looking at life. She had passed through the fiery ordeal of two London seasons unscorched in the furnace. Love had been the purifying influence. She had never lived upon the excitement of every-day pleasures and volatile loves, the intermittent fever of flirtations and engagements that are on and off half a dozen times in a season. The influence that guided all her thoughts and all her actions had been one steadfast and single-minded love. She had cared for no praises but from her lover's lips; she had dressed and danced, and played and sung, for none other than he. And now in her devotion to her child there was the same concentration and simplicity.

She did not know that she was looking her loveliest in that severe black gown and white cap ; she did not know that Cuthbert Ramsay admired her far too much for his peace. She only felt that he was very sincere in his devotion to the baby, and that he was a clever young man whose society suggested new ideas, and made her for the moment forgetful of her grief.

It was evening before she left Cheriton. She had stayed later than usual, and the shadows were creeping over the park as she walked to the west gate with Theodore and his friend, the carriage following slowly with nurse and baby ensconced among light fleecy wraps, lest vesper breezes should visit that human blossom too roughly. Theodore had proposed the walk across the park, and Juanita had assented immediately.

“I am always glad of a walk,” she said. “I have so few excuses for a ramble nowadays. I have to stay at home to take care of baby.”

“Do you doubt the capabilities of that highly-experienced nurse?” asked Ramsay laughingly.

“I doubt every one but myself, and I sometimes

doubt even my own discretion where my precious one is concerned."

"You will have more reason to doubt by-and-by when your precious one is old enough to be spoilt," said Theodore. "He has begun to take notice, and before very long he will notice that he is monarch of all he surveys, and that everybody about him is more or less his slave. He will live in that atmosphere till you send him to Eton, and then he will find himself suddenly confronted with the hard, cruel world of strictly Republican boyhood, which will jostle and hustle him with ruthless equality."

Lady Cheriton had business in London early in the following week. She was going to London to see her dentist, and her dressmaker, the latter being one of the arbiters of fashion who never go out of their way to wait upon their clients, but who do the rather exact reverence and attention from those clients. She had shopping to do at the West-end of London, that shopping which is so delightful to a lady who spends two-thirds of the year in the country. Above all, she had things to get at the "Stores," an institution which was dear to Lady

Cheriton's heart, in spite of all her husband's lectures upon political economy and the necessity of sustaining private enterprise and the shopkeeping interest.

Hearing of these engagements, and that Lady Cheriton intended to spend two nights in Victoria Street, Theodore suggested that he should be allowed to accompany her ladyship to London and to arrange a meeting between her and the young woman who called herself Marian Gray.

"If you really wish to help her," he concluded.

"I do really wish it," answered Lord Cheriton earnestly, "and the sooner the matter is put in hand the better pleased I shall be. Shall my wife call on this person?"

"She is very proud and very reserved. It might be better to bring about a meeting which would appear accidental. Marian goes for a walk with Miss Newton once or twice a week. I could arrange with her good friend that they should be walking in a particular place—Battersea Park for instance—at a certain hour, and Lady Cheriton could drive that way with me, and we could meet them. It would

be the easiest way of arriving at the truth as to Marian Gray's identity with Mercy Porter."

"Very good. You might suggest that to my wife."

Lady Cheriton, who was the soul of good-nature, fell in at once with Theodore's idea.

"I would do anything in my power to help that poor girl," she said; "for I think her sadly to be pitied. Her girlhood was so dull and joyless—such a ceaseless round of lessons and practice, without any of those pleasures to which most school-girls look forward. Her mother seemed to take a pride in keeping the girl apart from every one, in dressing her plainly, and in making her whole life as dreary as she could. I hardly wonder that the poor, hopeless creature surrendered to the first tempter—a man whose manner to women had always been called irresistible, even by women of the world, and a man who would not shrink from any amount of falsehood in pursuing his wicked aim. And now she is paying forfeit for her sin with a lonely life of toil in a London garret. Poor Mercy! She was so pretty and so refined—a lady in all her instincts."

Cuthbert Ramsay left on Monday, promising to

return at the end of the week ; and Theodore went up to town with Lady Cheriton on the following Wednesday. He went straight from the terminus to Wedgewood Street, where he saw Miss Newton, told her of Lord Cheriton's benevolent intentions to Marian, alias Mercy, and arranged the walk in Battersea Park for the following afternoon. Miss Newton and her *protégée* were to be walking upon the pathway beside the river at half-past three o'clock, when Lady Cheriton would drive that way.

Miss Newton had no difficulty in carrying out her part of the little plot. Marian was always ready to put aside her work for the pleasure of an afternoon with that one friend to whom her heart was ever open. She met Miss Newton at the starting-place of the tram-car, and they rode through the dusty crowded highways to the People's Park, where the flower-beds were gaudy with the rank luxuriance that is the beginning of the end of summer's good things, and where the geranium leaves were riddled by voracious slugs. There was a dustiness and worn-out air upon all the foliage and all the flowers, despite the coolness that came from the swiftly-flowing river—an air of fading and decay which per-

vades even the outermost regions of London when the season is over and the world of fashion has fled—the air of a theatre when the play is done and the lights are extinguished.

Sarah Newton and her young friend walked slowly along the gravel pathway, looking dreamily at the bright river, with its gay movement of passing boats and flowing waters. The elder of the two friends, who was wont to be full of cheery talk of newspapers and books, the history of the present, and the history of the past, was to-day unusually grave and silent.

“I’m afraid you are not well, dear Miss Newton,” said Marian, looking at her anxiously.

“Oh, yes, my dear, I am well enough. You know I am made of cast-iron, and except for the toothache, or a cold in my head, I hardly know what illness means. I am only a little thoughtful.”

They walked a few paces in silence, and then Miss Newton stopped suddenly to admire an approaching carriage. “What a stylish Victoria! Why, I declare there is Mr. Dalbrook, with a lady!”

The carriage drew up as she spoke, and Theodore

alighted. Marian had reddened a little at the mention of his name, but the flush upon her cheek deepened to crimson when she saw the lady in the carriage, and as the lady got out and came towards her the crimson faded to a deadly white.

“Mercy, child, I am glad with all my heart to find you,” said Lady Cheriton, holding out both her hands.

She was determined that there should be no doubt in the young girl’s mind as to her friendship and indulgence—that there should be nothing in the mode of her approach, in the tone of her voice, or the expression of her countenance that could bruise that broken reed. Love and pity looked out of those lovely southern eyes, which even in mature age retained much of their youthful beauty.

Mercy Porter went towards her, trembling, and with eyes brimming with tears. The calm, self-restrained nature had melted all at once at those gentle words in the familiar voice which had given her words of kindness and of praise in her desolate childhood. The transformation filled Theodore with wonder.

“Dear Lady Cheriton, I thought you would long

ago have forgotten the wretched girl to whom you were once so kind," she faltered.

"No, Mercy, I have never forgotten you. I have always been sorry—deeply sorry for you. And when Mr. Dalbrook told me about having met a person who interested him—a person associated with Cheriton—I knew that person must be you. My dear girl, I thank God that we have found you. My cousin will call upon you to-morrow and talk to you about your future—and of our plans for making your life happier than it is."

"There is no need," said Mercy, quickly, "I get on very well as I am. My life is quite good enough for me. I hope for nothing better, wish for nothing better."

"Nonsense, Mercy. His Lordship and I are your friends, and we mean to help you."

"I will accept help from no one, Lady Cheriton. I made up my mind about that long ago. I can earn my own living very well now. If ever my fingers or my eyes fail me—I can go to the work-house. I am deeply thankful for your pity—but I ask for no more, I will accept no more."

"We will see about that, Mercy," said Lady

Cheriton, with her gentle smile, quite unable to estimate the mental force in opposition to her.

She could understand a certain resistance, the pride of a sensitive nature painfully conscious of disgrace, unable to forget the past. She was prepared for a certain amount of difficulty in reconciling this proud nature to the acceptance of benefits ; but she never for one moment contemplated an implacable resistance.

“ Let me see your friend, Mercy,” she said, “ the lady who has been kind to you.”

“ Kind is a poor word. She has been my angel of deliverance. She has saved me from the great dismal swamp of self-abasement and despair.”

Miss Newton had walked briskly ahead with Theodore, so as to leave Lady Cheriton and Mercy together. Mercy ran after her friend, and brought her back a little way, as Lady Cheriton advanced to meet her.

“ Miss Newton, my one true and good friend in all this great world of London, and the only friend of my miserable childhood, Lady Cheriton,” said Mercy, looking from one to the other with that in-

tent look of thoughtful minds that work in narrow grooves.

“ I thank you for being good to one in whose fate I am warmly interested, Miss Newton,” said Lady Cheriton. “ You have done the work of the good Samaritan, and at least one wounded heart blesses you.”

They walked on a little way together, and Lady Cheriton spoke of the old house and the old family, the vanished race with which Sarah Newton had been associated in her girlhood.

“ They are all dead, I understand ? ” she said, in conclusion.

“ Yes, there is none left of the old family. They are not a fortunate race, and I fear there are few who regret them ; but I cannot help feeling sorry that they are all gone. They have passed away like a dream when one awakens.”

Lady Cheriton lingered on the river-side pathway for nearly half-an-hour, talking to Mercy and Miss Newton. Theodore left them together, after having obtained Mercy's permission to call at her lodgings on the following afternoon.

CHAPTER VI.

“ I saw her too.

Yes, but you must not love her.

I will not, as you do ; to worship her,
As she is heavenly and a blessed goddess ;
I love her as a woman.”

A DECENT-LOOKING woman opened the door of the house in Hercules Buildings, and ushered Mr. Dalbrook up two flights of stairs to the small back-room in which Mercy Porter had lived her lonely life from year's end to year's end. The tasteful arrangement of that humble chamber struck Theodore at the first glance. He had seen such rooms at Cambridge, where an undergraduate of small means had striven to work wonders with a few shabby old sticks that had done duty for half-a-dozen other undergraduates, and which had been but of poorest quality when they issued, new and sticky with cheap varnish, from the emporium of a local upholsterer.

Mercy was very pale, and although she received her visitor with outward calmness, he could see that

she had not yet recovered from yesterday's agitation.

"What induced you to take so much trouble to betray me, Mr. Dalbrook?" she asked.

"Betray is a very hard word, Miss Porter."

"You don't suppose that I believed yesterday's meeting was accidental? You took the trouble to bring Lady Cheriton across my path in order to satisfy your curiosity about my identity. Was that generous?"

"God knows that it was meant in your best interests. I knew that Lady Cheriton was your true and loyal friend—that she had more of the mother's instinct than your real mother, and that no pain could possibly come to you from any meeting with her. And then I had a very serious reason for bringing you together. It was absolutely necessary for me to make sure of your identity."

"Why necessary? What can it matter to you who I am?"

"Everything. I am the bearer of a very generous offer from Lord Cheriton—and it was essential that I should make that offer to the right person."

Mercy's face underwent a startling change at the sound of Lord Cheriton's name. She had been standing by the window in a listless attitude, just where she had risen to receive her visitor. She drew herself suddenly to her fullest height, and looked at him with flushed cheeks and kindling eyes.

"I will accept no generosity from Lord Cheriton," she said. "I want nothing from him except to be let alone. I want nothing from Lady Cheriton except her sympathy, and I would rather have even that at a distance. You have done the greatest harm you could do me in bringing me face to face with my old life."

"Believe me I had but one feeling, anxiety for your happiness."

"What is my happiness to you?" she retorted, almost fiercely. "You are playing at philanthropy. You can do me no good—you may do me much evil. You see me contented with my life—accustomed to its hardships—happy in the possession of one true friend. Why come to me with officious offers of favours which I have never sought?"

"You are ungenerous, and unjust. From the first hour of our acquaintance I saw that you were

of a different clay to that of the women among whom I found you—different by education, instinct, associations, family history. How could I help being interested in one who stood thus apart? How could I help wanting to know more of so exceptional a life?”

“Yes, you were interested, as you might have been in any other wreck—in any derelict vessel stranded on a lonely shore, battered, broken, empty, rudderless, picturesque in ruin. It was a morbid interest, an interest in human misery.”

He stated his commission plainly and briefly. He told her that it was Lord Cheriton’s earnest wish to provide for her future life—that he was ready, and even anxious, to settle a sum of money which would ensure her a comfortable income for the rest of her days. He urged upon her the consideration of the new happiness, and larger opportunities of helping others, which this competence would afford her; but she cut him short with an impatient movement of her head.

“Upon what ground does he base his generous offer?” she asked coldly.

“Upon the ground of his interest in your mother

and yourself—an interest which it is only natural for him to feel in one who was brought up on his estate, and whose father was his friend. It may be also that he feels himself in some wise to blame for the great sorrow of your life.”

“Tell him that I appreciate his noble contempt for money, his readiness to shed the sunshine of his prosperity upon so remote an outcast as myself; but tell him also that I would rather starve to death, slowly in this room, than I would accept the price of a loaf of bread from his hands. Do not hesitate to tell him this, in the plainest form of speech. It is only right that he should know the exact measure of my feelings towards him.”

After this Theodore could only bow to her decision and leave her.

“Lord Cheriton is my cousin, and a man whom I have every reason to regard with affection and respect,” he began.

She interrupted him sharply.

“He has never denied the cousinship, never treated you as the dirt under his feet—never looked down upon you from the altitude of his grandeur, with insufferable patronage——”

“Never. He has been most unaffectedly my friend, ever since I can remember.”

“Then you are right to think well of him—but you must let me have my opinion in peace, even although you are of his blood and I am——nothing to him. Good-bye. Forgive me if I have been ungracious and ungrateful. I have no doubt you meant well by me—only I would so much rather be let alone. It did me no good to see Lady Cheriton yesterday. My heart was tortured by the memories her face recalled.”

She gave him her hand, the thin white hand, with taper fingers worn by constant work. It was a very pretty hand, and it lay in his strong grasp to-day for the first time, so reserved had been her former greetings and farewells. He looked at the delicate hand for a moment or two before he let it go, and from the hand upwards to the fair, finely-cut face, and the large, dark grey eyes. That look of his startled her, the hollow cheeks flushed, and the eyelids fell beneath his steady gaze.

“Good-bye, Mercy,” he said, gently, “let me call you Mercy, for the sake of the link between us—

the link of common recollections, and the sad secrets of the past.’

“Call me what you like. It is not very probable we shall meet often.”

“You are very stubborn, cruel to yourself, and more cruel to those who want to help you. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” she echoed, almost in a whisper.

He went out into the shabby street haunted by those sad uplifted eyes, and the hollow cheeks faintly flushed with delicate bloom. How lovely she must have been in her dawning womanhood, and how closely she must have kept at home in the cottage by the west gate, seeing that he who had been so frequent a guest at Cheriton had never once met her there.

He was not satisfied to submit to this total failure of his mission without one further effort. He went from Hercules Buildings to Wedgewood Street, and saw his admirable Sarah Newton, into whose attentive ear he poured the story of Mercy’s obstinacy.

“She is a strange girl—a girl who could live in closest friendship with me all this time, and never tell me the secret of her past life,” said Miss

Newton thoughtfully. "Why she should be so perverse in her refusal of Lord Cheriton's offer I can't imagine—but you may depend she has a reason."

Theodore escorted Lady Cheriton back to Dorsetshire by the afternoon train, but they parted company at Wareham Station, he going on to Dorchester, where his sisters received him with some wonderment at his restlessness.

"It is rather a farce for you and Mr. Ramsay to make engagements which you never intend to keep," said Sophia peevishly; and it was thereupon expounded to him that he and his friend had pledged themselves to be present at a certain tennis party upon the previous afternoon.

"I'm very sorry we both forgot all about it," he apologised, "but I don't suppose we were missed."

"I don't suppose you would have been," answered his sister sulkily, "if there had been half a dozen decent young men at the party; but as Harrington preferred the office to our society or our friends, and as there were only three curates and one banker's

clerk at Mrs. Hazledean's, you and Mr. Ramsay would at least have been *something*."

"It is hardly worth any man's while to endure an afternoon's boredom—to fetch and carry teacups in a sweltering sun, and play tennis upon an unlevel lawn, if he is only to count for *something*, a mere make-weight."

"Oh, you young men give yourselves such abominable airs now-a-days," retorted Sophy, with a manner which implied that the young men of former generations had been modesty incarnate. "As for your friend, he has made a mere convenience of this house."

"As how, Sophy?"

"I don't think the fact requires explanation. First he goes to the Priory, and then to Cheriton, and then he is off to London, and then he is to be back on Saturday in order to lunch at the Priory on Sunday. If that is not making an hotel of your father's house I don't know what is."

"Perhaps I have been too unceremonious, forgetting that I no longer live here, that it behoves me now, perhaps, to act in all things as a visitor.

It was I who made the engagements, Sophy. You must not be angry with Ramsay."

"I am not angry. It cannot matter to me how Mr. Ramsay treats this house. No doubt he thinks himself a great deal too clever for our society, although we are not *quite* so feather-headed as most girls. He finds metal more attractive at the Priory."

"What do you mean, Sophy?"

"That he is over head and ears in love with Juanita. It does not need a very penetrating person to discover that."

"What nonsense! Why, he has not seen her above three times."

"Quite enough for a young man of his vehement character."

"What can have put such an idea into your head?"

"His way of talking about her—the expression of his face when he pronounces her name—the questions he asked me about her, showing the keenest interest in even the silliest details. What kind of a girl was she before she married, and how long had she known Sir Godfrey before they were

engaged, and had their love been a grand passion full of romance and poetry, or only a humdrum kind of affection encouraged by their mutual relations? Idiotic questions of that kind could only be asked by a man who was in love. And then how eagerly he snapped at your suggestion that he should go with you to the Priory next Sunday."

"It may be as you think," Theodore answered gravely. "I know his fervid temperament about most things; but I did not think he was the kind of man to fall in love—upon such very slight provocation."

"She may have given more encouragement than you suppose," said Sophy. "He is the kind of man that a frivolous, half-educated girl would think attractive. *She* would never find out the want of depth under that arrogant, self-assured manner. However, she has asked Janet and me for next Sunday, and I shall soon see how the land lies. You were always unobservant."

Theodore did not try to vindicate his character as an observer, albeit he knew no look or tone of his cousin's was likely to escape him; that even sharp-eyed malevolence could never watch

her more closely than love would watch out of his eyes.

Yes ; it was not unlikely that Cuthbert admired her too much for his own peace. He recalled words which had passed unnoticed when they were together. Poor Cuthbert ! He felt he had done wrong in exposing his friend to such an ordeal. Who could know her and not love her ?

CHAPTER VII.

“For life must life, and blood must blood repay.”

CUTHBERT RAMSAY arrived at Dorchester on Saturday just in time to dress for dinner, and he contrived to make himself so agreeable to all the family in the course of that friendly meal, that Janet and Sophia forgave him for his base desertion, and Harrington forgave him for being a great deal cleverer and happier than himself. He was in very high spirits—had been working hard in London—attending lectures—witnessing operations—and looking after those gratis patients in the slums who were his chief delight.

“I love to find out what life means below the surface,” he said. “One only gets at realities when one comes face to face with the struggle for existence. The children—the poor pinched atomies whom one looks at with a shudder, remembering that *they* are the men and women of the future! That is the terrible point—to think that in those little half-

starved faces one sees the men who are to meet in Trafalgar Square and unmake our smooth, easy world—to think that in those wizened morsels of humanity we have all the elements of discord and destruction in the days to come. *That* is the appalling thought.”

“It is a thought that should teach us our duty to them,” said Janet.

“What do you take that duty to be?”

“To educate them!”

“Educate—yes—educate them in the ways of health and cleanliness—after we have fed them. *That* I take to be our primary duty to the children as much as to the lower animals. You know the old adage, Miss Dalbrook, *mens sana in corpore sano*. Did you ever hear of a sound and healthy mind in an unsound scrofulous body? So long as we leave the little children to semi-starvation, we are sacrificing to the Demon Scrofula, which is to our enlightened age what the Demon Leprosy was to those darker ages whose ignorance we prate about.”

“I am not in favour of pauperising the working classes,” said Harrington.

“That idea of pauperism is a bugbear and a

stumbling-block in the path of benevolence. Do you pauperise an agricultural labourer whose utmost wages are fifteen shillings a week if you provide his children with two good meals of fresh meat in the seven days, and so grow better bone and sinew than can be produced upon bread and dripping, or bread and treacle? Do you pauperise a man by giving him a free supply of pure water, and larger, airier rooms than his scanty wages will buy for him? To subsidize is not to pauperize, Mr. Dalbrook; and if England is to hold together upon the old lines during the coming centuries, the well-to-do will have to help the poor upon a stronger and wider basis than that on which they have helped them in the past, and a good deal of the spare cash that is now being spent on fine clothes and dinner parties will have to be spent upon feeding and housing the million."

The two young men drove over to Milbrook early on Sunday morning, in order to attend morning service at the picturesque old church. Matthew Dalbrook and his daughters were to join them at the Priory in time for luncheon, which was to be a regular family party.

Cuthbert was silent for the greater part of the drive, and Theodore was thoughtfully observant of him. Yes, there might be something in Sophy's idea. More than once during that long drive the young man's face brightened with a sudden smile, a smile of ineffable happiness, as of a dreaming lover who sees the gates of his earthly paradise opening, sees his mistress coming to meet him on the threshold. Theodore's heart sank at the thought that Sophia had hit upon the truth. Anyway there was hopelessness in the idea. If it were to be Theodore's blessed fate to see the one love of his life victorious, soon or late, after long patience and devoted sacrifice, Cuthbert must taste the bitterness of having loved in vain. But he would hardly be worthy of pity, perhaps, seeing that he had known from the first how the land lay, seeing that honour forbade his falling in love with Juanita.

But will honour make a man blind to beauty, deaf to the music of a voice, impervious to the subtle charms of all that is purest, best, and loveliest in womanhood? Theodore began to think that he had done wrong in bringing his friend within the influence of irresistible charms.

“I was a fool to think that he could help himself; I was a worse fool to suppose that she will ever care for me—the humdrum cousin whom she has known all her life—the country solicitor whose image she has always associated with leases and bills of dilapidation—a little more than a bailiff, and a little less than a gentleman.”

They consigned the dog-cart to the village ostler, who was expiating the jovial self-indulgence of Saturday night in the penitential drowsiness of Sunday morning, and they were in their places in the grey old church when Lady Carmichael came to the chancel pew. Theodore's watchful eyes followed her from her entrance in a halo of sunshine, which was suddenly obscured as the curtain dropped behind her, to the moment when she bowed her head in prayer. He saw her face brighten as she passed the pew where he and his friend were sitting, and he told himself that it was Cuthbert's presence which conjured up that happier light in her soft, dark eyes. On the walk from the church to the Priory it was with Cuthbert she talked—Cuthbert the irrepressible, who had so much to say that he must needs find listeners. It was Cuthbert who sat next her at lun-

cheon, and who engrossed her attention throughout the meal. It was Cuthbert who went through the hot-houses, fern-houses, and greenhouses with her after luncheon, and gave her practical lessons in botany and entomology as they went along, and who promised her some Austrian frogs. The day was one long triumph for Cuthbert Ramsay, and he gave himself up to the intoxication of the hour as a drunkard surrenders to strong drink, unconditionally, without thought of the morrow.

“What do you think of your friend’s infatuation *now*?” asked Janet, with her most biting accent, as she and Theodore followed in the horticultural procession, she carefully picking up her gown at every one of those treacherous puddles which are to be found in the best-regulated hot-houses. “Have you any doubt in your mind now?”

“No. I have no doubt.”

The carriages were at the door half-an-hour afterwards, and all through the homeward drive Cuthbert was silent as the grave. Only as they came into Dorchester did he find speech to say,—

“I shall have to go back to town early to-morrow morning, Theodore!”

“So soon. What an unquiet spirit you are! You'll come back to us next Friday or Saturday, I hope.”

“I don't know. I'll try; but I'm rather afraid I can't.”

Theodore did not press the point, and his friend kept his word, and left by the first train on Monday morning, after having been intolerably stupid on Sunday evening, according to the sisters, who were disposed to think themselves especially ill-used by Mr. Ramsay's obvious infatuation for Lady Carmichael.

“I was beginning to respect Juanita for her conduct in the difficult position of a young widow,” said Sophia, “but I begin to fear that she is no better than the rest of them, and that her leaving off crape upon her last gowns is a sign that she means to marry again before the second year of her widowhood is over.”

Lady Cheriton's roses were in danger from a failure of the water in that old-fashioned well which had hitherto supplied the flower-gardens. There had been an unusually long spell of dry weather

since the beginning of July, and the gardeners were in despair. When Theodore went over to the Chase with his portmanteau, in accordance with an engagement made the previous week, he found that Lord Cheriton had that morning given an order for the sinking of the old well from twenty to thirty feet deeper.

"There is plenty of water, my lord," said the head gardener, "if we only go deep enough for it."

"Very well, Mackenzie, go as deep as you like, so long as you don't go below the water-bearing strata. You had better put on plenty of hands. Her ladyship is uneasy about her roses, seeing how you have been stinting them lately."

"It has been hard work, my lord, to do our duty by the roses, and keep the lawns in decent order. The ground would be as hard as iron if we didn't use a good deal of water for the grass."

"Get to work, Mackenzie, and don't waste time in talking about it. Drive over to Gadby's, and tell him to send some good men."

This conversation took place upon the terrace directly after Theodore's arrival; and when the

gardener had gone off to the stables to get the dog-cart-of-all-work, Lord Cheriton and his cousin walked in the direction of the well.

The well was in one of the kitchen-gardens, quite the oldest bit of garden ground at Cheriton, a square garden of about two acres, shut in with high crumbling old red brick walls, upon which grew blue gages and William pears, egg-plums and apricots, attaining more or less to perfection as the aspect favoured them. It was a pleasant garden to dream in upon a summer afternoon, for there was an air of superabundant growth that was almost tropical in the century old espaliers, albeit they had long ceased to produce meritorious fruit, and in the sprawling leaves and yellow blossoms of the vegetable marrows which seemed to be grown for no purpose except to produce champion gourds or pumpkins, to be ultimately hung up as ornaments in the gardener's cottage, or to rot in a corner of the greenhouse. There is always one old greenhouse in such a garden given over to preserving spiders and accumulating rubbish.

In the middle of a vegetable marrow warren stood the well—a well of eight feet in diameter, sur-

rounded by a low brick wall, of that same bright red brick which crumbled behind the blue gages and the egg-plums, and which the birds pecked and perforated, for very wantonness. It was a well of the old pattern, with a ponderous wooden roller, and an iron spindle, which had wound up water from those same cool depths for over a hundred years. It had run dry often, in the time of the Strangways, that good old well; but no Strangway had ever thought of improving anything upon the estate; so in seasons of drought the flowers had drooped and the turf had withered unheeded by the proprietorial eye.

Mr. Gadby's men appeared after their dinner, and got seriously to work by about three o'clock, at which hour Theodore and Lady Cheriton were strolling in the rose garden, while the master of the house sat in the library reading. Theodore had observed a marked change in his cousin since his last visit to the Chase. There was a worried look in Lord Cheriton's face which had not been there even after the shock of the murder, a look of nervous apprehension which showed itself from time to time in a countenance where firmness of character

and an absolute fearlessness had been hitherto the strongest characteristics.

He had not yet told his lordship the result of his interview with Mercy Porter. He had waited till an opportunity for quiet, confidential talk should come about naturally, and that opportunity now occurred. Lady Cheriton left him after half-an-hour's review of the roses, and he went through the open window into the library where Lord Cheriton sat in his large arm-chair at his own particular table, reading the political summing-up in the last *Quarterly*.

"Shall I be disturbing you if I sit here?" asked Theodore, taking a volume from the table where the newest books were always to be found.

"On the contrary, I shall be very glad of a little conversation. I have been struggling through an analysis of last session, which is all weariness and vexation of spirit. The session was dull, the commentary is duller. I am anxious to know how you got on with Mrs. Porter's daughter."

"Very badly, I regret to say, from our point of view. She rejects your generous offer. She prefers her present hard life, with its independence. She will accept no obligation from any one."

“Humph ! She must be a curious young woman,” said Lord Cheriton, with a vexed air. “I should have liked very much to have made her life bright and easy, if she would have let me—for her father’s sake. On what ground did she refuse my offer ?”

“On the ground of preferring to work for her living, and to live a hard life. She has taken that upon herself, I believe, as an expiation for her past errors, although she did not say that in so many words. She is wonderfully firm. I never saw such a resolute temper in so young—and so gentlemanly—a woman.”

“You tried to overcome her objections, you represented to her how easy and pleasant her life might be in some picturesque village—among the hills and lakes, or by the sea—and how she might live among people who would know nothing of her past history, who would grow to be fond of her for her own sake.”

“I urged all this upon her. I am as anxious as you are that she should leave that dreary attic—that monotonous labour—but nothing I could say was of the least use. She was resolute—she would accept nothing from you.”

“From me—ah, that is it!” cried Lord Cheriton, suddenly. “Had the offer come from any one else she might have been less stubborn. But from *me* she will take nothing—not a loaf of bread if she were starving. That is the explanation of her hardness—it is to me she is adamant. Tell me the truth, Theodore. Don’t spare my feelings. This girl hates me, I suppose?”

“I fear she has a deeply-rooted prejudice against you. She may—most unjustly—blame you for her misery, because Colonel Tremayne was your friend.”

“Yes, that is her feeling, no doubt; it is on that account she hates me. Perhaps she is justified in her anger. I ought to have shot that scoundrel. Had we both lived fifty years sooner I suppose I should have shot him.”

“I don’t think you could have been called upon to do that even by the old code of honour. Mercy was not allied to you——”

“No, but she dwelt at my gates. She was under my protection—she had no other man living to defend her. I ought to have punished her seducer—it was incumbent on me to do it. Because there

was no one else," he added slowly, after a long pause.

"It may be on that account she rejects your generous offer. I cannot pretend to interpret her feelings, but there was certainly some strong personal prejudice on her part. She was deeply moved. She burst into a passion of sobs. 'Not from him,' she cried, 'I will accept nothing from him. Of all the men upon this earth he shall be the last to help me!'"

Lord Cheriton flung the *Quarterly* from him with a passionate gesture, as he started to his feet and began to walk up and down the long clear space in front of the windows.

"Theodore," he said suddenly, "you have not yet come face to face with all the problems of life. Perhaps you have not yet found out how hard it is to help people. I would have given much to be able to help that girl—to assure her an easy and reputable existence—the refinements of life amidst pleasant surroundings. What would it matter to me whether I allowed her one hundred or two hundred a year? All I desire is that her life should be happy. And of deliberate malice—of sheer per-

versity—she rejects my help, she dooms herself to the seamstress' slavery, and to a garret in Lambeth. My God, to think that with all the will and all the power to help her, I cannot come between her and that sordid misery. It is hard, Theodore, it is very hard upon a man like me. There is nothing I hold of this world's goods that I have not worked for honestly; and when I want to do good for others with what I have won, I am barred by their folly. It is enough to make me mad."

Never before had Theodore seen this self-abandonment in his stately cousin, the man who bore in every tone and every gesture the impress of his acknowledged ascendancy over his fellow-men. To see such a man as this so completely unhinged by a woman's perversity was a new thing to Theodore Dalbrook; and his heart went out to his kinsman as it had never done before.

"My dear Cheriton, you have done all that was in your power to do for that mistaken young woman," he said, holding out his hand, which the elder man grasped warmly. "Whatever wrong you may have unwittingly brought about by the presence of a blackguard under your roof, you have done

your best to atone for that wrong. The most sensitive, the most punctilious of men could do no more."

"I thank you, Theodore, for your sympathy. Yes, I have done my best for her—you will bear witness to that."

"A father could scarcely do more for an erring daughter. I only wish her mother felt half as kindly towards her as you, upon whom her claim is so slight."

"No, no; it is a substantial claim. She is fatherless, and her mother is dependent upon me. I stand, as it were, *in loco parentis*. Well, we will say no more about her; she must go her own way. Only, if ever you find an opportunity of helping her—for me, you will do me a great favour by taking prompt advantage of it."

"I shall gladly do so. I am interested in her for her own sake, as well as for yours."

"You are a good fellow, Theodore, and I know you wish us well. I will go a step further than that and say I know that I can trust you."

This was said with an earnestness which impressed Theodore. It seemed to him almost as if

his kinsman foresaw that inevitable hour in which there must be perfect unreserve between them—in which the younger man would have to say to his senior and superior in rank, “I know the secret of your earlier years. I know the dark cloud that has overshadowed your life.”

They talked for a little while of indifferent subjects, and then Lord Cheriton proposed a stroll in the direction of the well.

“I should like to see whether those fellows have begun work,” he said.

The old garden looked its sleepiest in the westering sunlight, but there was business going on there nevertheless, and a great heap of damp clay had been flung out by the side of the low brick parapet. Two men were at work below, and there were two men above, while a fifth, a foreman and leading light, looked on and gave directions.

“Glad to see you’ve tackled the job, Carter,” said Lord Cheriton.

“Yes, my lord, we’ve got on to it pretty well. Could I have a word with your lordship?”

“Certainly, as many words as you like. How

mysterious you look, Carter ! There is nothing in your communication that Mr. Dalbrook is not to hear, I suppose ? ”

“ No, my lord, Mr. Dalbrook don’t matter ; but I thought you wouldn’t care for everybody to know, lest it should get round to her ladyship, and give her a scare.”

“ What are you driving at, Carter, with your ladyships and your scares ? Have you seen a ghost at the bottom of the well ? ”

“ No, my lord, but the men found this in the surface clay, and I thought it might have some bearing upon—last year—the murder.”

He dropped out his words hesitatingly, as if he hardly dared approach that ghastly theme, and then took something out of his jacket pocket, and handed it to Lord Cheriton.

It was a Colt’s revolver, by no means of the newest make, rusted by lying long under water. The foreman had amused his leisure since the discovery in trying to rub off the rust with a large cotton handkerchief, assisted by his corduroy coat-sleeve, and had succeeded in polishing a small silver plate upon the butt of the pistol so as to make the

initials "T. D." engraved upon it easily decipherable.

There was not much in the discovery perhaps, but by the ghastly change in Lord Cheriton's face Theodore saw that to him at least it appeared of fatal significance. His hand shook as it held the pistol, his eyes had a look of absolute horror as they scrutinized it; and nothing could be more obvious than the effort with which he controlled his agitation, and looked from the builder's foreman to Theodore with an assumption of tranquillity.

"It may mean much, or nothing, Carter," he said, putting the pistol in his coat pocket. "It was quite right of you to bring the matter before me."

"I thought the initials on the pistol might lead to something being found out, my lord," said the foreman. "I don't think there can be much doubt the murderer chucked it in there."

"Don't you? I have gone into the subject of circumstantial evidence a little deeper than you have, Carter; it was my trade, don't you know, just as laying bricks was yours, and I can tell you that the odds are ten to one against this pistol having belonged to the murderer. Do you think it likely

that the man who shot Sir Godfrey Carmichael would have gone out of his way to throw his pistol down that particular well ? ”

“ I don’t know about that, my lord ; it would have been a safe hiding-place, if the water hadn’t given out—and it would be in his way if he were making for the West Gate. He could hardly have taken a shorter cut than across this garden.”

“ Perhaps not—if both the garden doors were open that night.”

“ I don’t think anybody ever saw them shut, my lord, night or day,” answered Carter, with respectful persistency.

Theodore knew by the very look of the clumsy wooden doors, pushed back against the old wall, with rusty hinges, and with the tendrils of vine or plum tree growing over their edges, that the man was right. The path across this garden and the next garden led in a direct line to the West Lodge, and it was this way by which the servants went on most of their errands to the village.

The one idea suggested by the choice of that hiding-place was that the person who threw away that pistol was familiar with the premises. The

well was about thirty feet away from the path, and screened by the old espaliers. There was a gap in the espaliers where an ancient and cankered apple tree had been taken out, and it was by this opening that the gardeners generally went to draw water. They had trodden a hard foot track in their going and coming.

It was always possible that a stranger exploring the grounds furtively and in haste might have been sharp enough to hit upon the well as a safe and handy hiding-place. It would, of course, have been vital to the murderer to get rid of his weapon as soon as possible after the deed was done, lest he should be taken red-handed and with that piece of evidence upon him.

Theodore saw in that pistol with the initials "T. D.," confirmatory evidence against the husband of Mrs. Danvers, the one person in the world who had ground for an undying hatred of Lord Cheriton and his race. He made no remark upon the discovery of the weapon, fearing to say too much ; and he waited quietly to see how his kinsman would act in the matter. That ghastly change in Lord Cheriton's countenance as he examined the pistol,

suggested that he had come to the same conclusion as Theodore. Remorse and horror could hardly have been more plainly expressed by the human countenance: and what remorse could be more terrible than that of the man who saw the sin of his youth visited upon his innocent daughter?

“Shall you take any steps with reference to this discovery?” asked Theodore, when they had gone half way back to the house in absolute silence.

“What steps can I take, do you think? Send for another London detective—or for the same man again—and give him this pistol? To what end? He would be no nearer finding the murderer because of the finding of the pistol.”

“The initials might lead to identification.”

“Did you never hear of such a thing as a second-hand pistol? And do you think an assassin would make use of a pistol with his own initials upon it to commit murder? I do not.”

“Not the professional assassin. But we are all agreed that this murder was an act of vengeance—for some reason at present unknown—and the semi-lunatic who would commit murder for such a motive would not be likely to do his work very neatly. His

brain would be fevered by passion or alcohol, in all probability, and he would go to work blindly. ’

“ That is no more than a theory, and my experience has shown me that such theories are generally falsified by fact. The murder was so far neatly done that the murderer got clear off, in spite of a most rigorous search. I doubt if the pistol, with initials which may belong to anybody in the world, will help us to track him after more than a year.”

“ Then you mean to do nothing in the matter ? ”

“ I think not. I cannot see my way to doing anything at present ; but if you like to take the pistol to Scotland Yard and see what impression it makes upon the experts there——”

“ I should much like to do so. I cannot ignore the fact that so long as Sir Godfrey’s murderer remains undiscovered, there is a possibility of peril for you and for Juanita, and for Juanita’s child. Who can tell whether that deadly hatred is appeased—whether the man who killed your daughter’s husband is not on the watch to kill you or your daughter—when he sees his opportunity ? ”

“ As for myself, I must take my chance. I

would to God that the ball had struck me instead of my son-in-law. It would have been better—a lighter chastisement. I have lived my life. I have done all I ever hoped to do in this world. A few years, more or less, could matter very little to me. And yet, life is sweet, Theodore, life is sweet! However heavily we are handicapped, we most of us would choose to finish our race.”

There was infinite melancholy in his tone, the melancholy of a man who sees the shadows of a great despair darkening round him, the melancholy of a man who gives up the contest of life, and feels that he is beaten.

“Do not say anything to my wife about this business,” he said; “let her be happy as long as she can. She has not forgotten last summer, but she is beginning to be something like what she was before that blow fell upon us. The advent of Juanita’s baby has worked wonders. There is something to look forward to in that child’s existence. Life is no longer a cul-de-sac.”

“There is one thing to be done,” said Theodore, after an interval of silence. “The bullet was kept, of course.”

“Yes, it is in the possession of the police, I believe.”

“Would it not be well to ascertain if it fits the pistol you have in your pocket?”

“Yes. I will go to the station to-morrow and look into that.”

There was no more said about the pistol that evening. Theodore felt that it would be cruelty to dwell upon the subject, seeing that his kinsman had been deeply affected by the discovery, and that he was oppressed by a gloom which he strove in vain to shake off.

It was evident to Theodore that those initials on the pistol had a terrible meaning for Lord Cheriton, that he recognized in those initials the evidence of an injured husband's vengeance, a hatred which had been undiminished by the lapse of years.

He told himself that the tardiness of that revenge might be accounted for by various contingencies, any one of which would lessen the improbability of that long interval between the wrong done and the retribution exacted. It might be that the murderer had been an exile in a distant world. It might be that he had been a criminal fretting him-

self against the bars of a felon's prison, nursing his anger in the dull, dead days of penal servitude. Such things have been.

It was clear to Theodore Dalbrook that in those initials upon the Colt's revolver lay the clue to the murderer, and that Lord Cheriton shrank with horror from the revelation which those two letters might bring about. Yet, whatever evil might come upon the master of Cheriton out of the secret past, it was vital that the murderer should be found, lest his second crime should be more hideous than his first; and Theodore was resolved that he would spare no effort in the endeavour to find him, living or dead.

"God grant that I may find a grave rather than the living man," he thought, "for Cheriton's sake. God grant that he may be spared the humiliation of having his story told to all the world."

He went into Cheriton village early upon the following afternoon, and dropped in upon the doctor, an old inhabitant, whose father and grandfather before him had prescribed for all the parish, rich and poor. Mr. Dolby, *par excellence* Dr. Dolby, was a bachelor, a spare, sharp-visaged man of about

forty, social and expansive, a keen sportsman, and a good billiard player, a man whose lines had been set in pleasant places, for he had inherited a roomy old cottage, with capacious stabling, and twenty acres of the fattest meadow land in Cheriton parish, and he led exactly that kind of life which his soul loved. It would have been no gain to such a man to have changed places with Baron Rothschild or Lord Salisbury. He would have been in all that constitutes human happiness a loser by such an exchange. So cheery a person was naturally popular in a narrow world like Cheriton, and Mr. Dolby was a general favourite, a favourite in polite society, and in the billiard room at the Cheriton Arms, which, in default of a club, served as the afternoon and evening rendezvous for lawyer, doctor, and the tenant-farmers of a gentlemanly class—the smock-frock farmers and tradespeople having their own particular meeting place at the Old House at Home, a public-house at the other end of the village. Theodore had known Mr. Dolby from his childhood, and the medical adviser of Cheriton was an occasional dropper-in at the luncheon table in Cornhill, when business transactions with his tailor or his

banker took him to the County town. There was nothing unusual, therefore, in Theodore's afternoon call at Dovecotes, a somewhat picturesque name which had been given to the doctor's domicile by his predecessor, who had devoted his later years to an ardent cultivation of Barbs and Jacobins and other aristocratic birds, and who had covered a quarter of an acre of garden ground with pigeon-houses of various construction.

Theodore found Mr. Dolby smoking his afternoon pipe in the seclusion of his surgery. He had made a long morning round, had driven something between twenty and thirty miles, and considered himself entitled to what he called his *otium cum* whisky and water, which refreshment stood on a small table at his elbow while he lolled in his capacious easy chair.

He welcomed his visitor with effusion, and insisted on calling for another syphon, and having another little table arranged at the elbow of the other easy chair.

"Make yourself comfortable, old chap, and let us have a jaw," he said. "I haven't seen you for ages. Are you at the Chase?"

They talked of the usual village topics, glanced at the great world of politics, speculated upon the prospects of the shooting season, and then Theodore approached the real business of his visit.

“There is a fellow I am interested in from a business point of view,” he began, “who has been hanging about this place, off and on, for the last five-and-twenty years, I believe, though I have never happened to meet him. He is a drinking man, and altogether a bad lot; but it is my business to hunt him down.”

“On account of some property, I suppose?”

“Yes, on account of some property. Now, I know what an observer you are, Dolby, and what a wonderful memory you have——”

“I haven’t wasted it up in London,” interjected Dolby. “A week in Oxford Street and the Strand would take ten years off my memory. It’s pretty clear at present, thank God. Well, now, what about this fellow, what kind of a fellow is he—a gentleman or a cad?”

“He was once a gentleman, but he may have tumbled pretty low by this time. He was going down hill at a good pace five-and-twenty years ago.”

“Egad, then he must be at the bottom of the hill, I take it. What is he like—fat or lean, dark or fair, short or tall?”

“A tall man, fair complexion, a man who has once been handsome, a showy-looking man,” answered Theodore, quoting the house-agent.

“That will do. Yes, just such a man as that was at the Arms one night—six—eight—upon my word I believe it must have been ten years ago. A man who put on a good deal of side, though his clothes were no end seedy—ragged edges to his trousers, don’t you know—and though his hand shook like an aspen leaf. I played a fifty game with him, and I should say, though I beat him easy, that he had once been a fine player. He was in wretched form, poor creature, but——”

“Ten years ago, do you really think it was as long ago you saw him?”

“I know it was. It would be in seventy-four, that was the year Potter was returned for Screw-mouth. I remember we were all talking of the election the night that fellow was there. Yes, I remember him perfectly; a tall, fair man, a wreck, but with the traces of former good looks. I fancy

he must have been a soldier. He slept at the Arms that night, and I met him rather early next morning, before nine o'clock, coming away from the Chase—met him within ten yards of the West Lodge.”

“Did he talk about Lord Cheriton?”

“A good deal—talked rather wild, too—and would have blackguarded your cousin if we hadn't shut him up pretty sharply. He pretended to have been intimate with him before he made his way at the Bar, and he talked in the venomous way a man who has been a failure very often does talk about a man who has been a success. It's only human nature, I suppose. There's a spice of venom in human nature.”

“Have you never seen this man at Cheriton since that occasion — never within the last ten years?”

“Never, and I should be inclined, looking at the gentleman from a professional point of view, to believe that he must have been under the turf for a considerable portion of that period. I don't think there could have been three years' life in the man I played billiards with that evening. Hard lines for

him, poor beggar, if there was property coming to him. He looked as if he wanted it bad enough."

"What had he been doing at the Chase, do you suppose?"

"I haven't the least idea. I was driving in my cart when I passed him. I looked back and watched him for two or three minutes. He was walking very slowly, and with a languid air, like a man who was not used to walking. Ten years—no, Theodore—I don't think it's possible such a shaky subject as that could have lasted ten years. One certainly does see very miserable creatures crawling on for years after they have been ticketed for the undertaker—but this man—no—I don't think he could hold out long after that October morning. I fancy he was booked for a quick passage."

"He may have pulled himself together, and turned over a new leaf."

"Too old, and too far gone for that."

"Or what if he had done something bad and got himself shut up for a few years?"

"Penal servitude do you mean? Well, that might do something! It's a very severe regimen for the habitual drunkard—and it means kill or

cure. In this case I should say decidedly kill."

"But it might cure."

"I should think the chances of cure were as two in two hundred. I won't say it would be impossible, not having examined the patient—but so far as observation can teach a man anything, observation taught me that the case was hopeless."

"And yet it is my belief that this man was at Cheriton some time last year. You know everybody, and talk to everybody, my dear Dolby. I wish you'd find out for me whether I am right?"

"I'll do my best," answered Mr. Dolby cheerfully. "If the man has been seen by anybody in the village I ought to be able to hear about him. Everybody was tremendously on the look out last year, after the murder, and no stranger could have escaped observation."

"Perhaps not—but before the murder——"

"Anybody who had been seen shortly before the murder would have been remembered and talked about. You can have no idea of the intense excitement that event caused among us. We seemed to

talk of nothing else, and to think of nothing else for months.”

“And you suppose that if the man I want had been about—for a few hours only, just long enough to come and go away again on that fatal night, he would have been remembered?”

“I am sure of it. He would have inevitably been taken for the murderer. Remember, we were all on the alert, ready to fix upon the first suspicious-looking person our memory could suggest to us.”

“Do you think Johnson would remember the man?”

Johnson was the proprietor of the Cheriton Arms.

“My dear fellow, did you ever find Johnson’s memory available about any transaction six months old? Johnson’s memory is steeped in beer, buried in flesh. Johnson is a perambulating barrel of forgetfulness—a circumambulatory hogshead of stupidity. Ask Johnson to tell you the Christian name of his grandmother, and I would venture a new hat he would be unable to answer you. There is nothing to be got out of mine host of the Cheriton Arms. Be sure of that.”

“I’m afraid you are right,” said Theodore.

He felt as if he had come to a point at which there was no thoroughfare. There was the pistol, with the initials “T. D.,” and he had made up his mind that the man for whom those initials had been engraved was the man who gave his name as Danvers when he called upon the house-agent, the man whose wife had been known for years as Mrs. Danvers. He had made up his mind that this man and no other had murdered Godfrey Carmichael—that many years after the wife’s death the husband had returned from exile or imprisonment, embittered so much the more, so much the more vindictive, so much the more malignant for all that he had suffered in that interval, and had taken the first opportunity to attack a hated household. That he would strike again if he should be allowed to live and be at large Theodore had no doubt. A second murder, and a third murder, seemed the natural sequence of the first. He remembered the murders of the Jermys at Stanfield Hall—the savage hatred which tried to slay four people, two of whom were utterly unconnected with the wrong that called for vengeance. In the face of such a story as that of the

murderer Rush, who could say that Theodore's apprehension of an insatiable malignity, wreaking itself in further bloodshed, was groundless ?

He left Dovecotes disheartened, hardly knowing what his next step was to be, and very hopeless of tracking a man who had so contrived as to be unseen upon his deadly errand. He must have come and gone verily like a thief in the night, sheltered by darkness, meeting no one ; and yet there was the evidence of the servants at the inquest, who swore to having heard mysterious footsteps outside the house late at night upon more than one occasion shortly before the murder. If the murderer had been about upon several nights, creeping round by the open windows of the reception rooms, watching his opportunity, what had he done with himself in the day ? Where had he hidden himself ; how had he evaded the prying eyes of a village, which is all eyes, all ears for the unexplained stranger ?

CHAPTER VIII.

When haughty expectations prostrate lie
And grandeur crouches like a guilty thing."

THEODORE walked moodily along the lane leading to the West Gate, brooding over discrepancies and difficulties in the case which he had set himself to unravel. As he drew near Mrs. Porter's cottage he saw Lord Cheriton come out of the porch, unattended. He came slowly down the steps to the gate, with his head bent, and his shoulders stooping wearily, an attitude which was totally unlike his usual erect carriage, an attitude which told distinctly of mental trouble.

Theodore overtook him, and walked by his side, at the risk of being considered intrusive. He was very curious as to his kinsman's motive for visiting Mrs. Porter, after yesterday's conversation about Mercy.

“Have you been trying to bring about a reconciliation between mother and daughter?” he asked.

“No. I have told you that little good could result from bringing those two obstinate spirits together. You have seen for yourself what the daughter can be—how perverse, how cruel, what a creature of prejudice and whim. The mother’s nature is still harder. What good could come of bringing such a daughter back to such a mother? No, it was with no hope of reconciliation that I called upon Mrs. Porter. I have been thinking very seriously of your friend Ramsay’s suggestion of mental trouble. I regret that I did not act upon the hint sooner, and get my friend Mainwaring to see her, and advise upon the case. I shall certainly consult him about her—but as he has a very important practice, and a large establishment under his care, it may be very difficult for him to come to Cheriton. I think, therefore, it might be well to send her up to the neighbourhood of London—to some quiet northern suburb, for instance, within half-an-hour’s drive of Mainwaring’s asylum, which is near Cheshunt; then, if it should be deemed advisable to place her under restraint for a time—though I cannot suppose

that likely—the business could be easily accomplished.

“Your idea then would be——”

“To take her up to London, with her servant, as soon as I have found comfortable lodgings for her in a quiet neighbourhood. I have proposed the journey to her this afternoon, on the ground of her being out of health and in need of special advice. I told her that people had remarked upon her altered appearance, and that I was anxious she should have the best medical care. She did not deny that she was ailing. I think, therefore, there will be very little difficulty in getting her away when I am ready to remove her.”

“What is your own impression as to her mental condition?”

“I regret to say that my impression very much resembles that of your friend. I see a great change in her since I last had any conversation with her. Yes, I fear that there is something amiss, and that it is no longer well for her to live in that cottage, with a young girl for her only companion. It would be far better for her to be in a private asylum—where, hers being a very mild case, life might be

made easy and agreeable for her. I know my friend Mainwaring to be a man of infinite benevolence, and that there would be nothing wanting to lighten her burden."

He sighed heavily. There was a look in his face of unutterable care, of a despondency which saw no issue, no ray of light far off in the thickening gloom. Theodore thought he looked aged by several years since yesterday, as if the evidence of the pistol had struck him to the heart.

"He knows now that it was his own sin that brought about this evil," thought Theodore.

He could conceive the agony of the father's heart, knowing that for his own wrong-doing his innocent daughter had been called upon to make so terrible an expiation. He could penetrate into the dark recesses of the sinner's mind, where remorse for that early error, and for all the false steps which it had necessitated, dominated every other thought. Till yesterday James Dalbrook might have supposed his sin a thing of the past, atoned for and forgiven—its evil consequences suffered in the past, the account ruled off in the book of fate, and the acquittance given. To-day he knew that his sin had

cost him his daughter's happiness; and over and above that horror of the past there lay before him the hazard of some still greater horror in the future. Could anybody wonder that his eyes were sunken and dull, as they never had been before within Theodore's memory? Could anybody wonder at the strained look in the broad, open forehead, beneath which the eyes looked out wide apart under strongly-marked brows; or at the hard lines about the mouth, which told of sharpest mental pain?

Late that evening, when Lady Cheriton had gone to bed, Theodore approached the subject of the pistol.

"Did you compare the ball with the revolver that was found yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes. The ball fits the bore. I don't know that the fact goes to prove much—but so far as it goes it is now in the knowledge of our local police. Unfortunately they are not the most brilliant intellects I know of."

"If you will let me have the pistol to-night before we go to bed I will go up to town by an early train to-morrow and take it to Scotland Yard, as you suggested."

“I suggested nothing of the kind, my dear Theodore. I attach very little importance to the discovery of the pistol as a means towards discovering the murderer. I said you might take it to Scotland Yard if you liked—that was all.”

“I should like to do so. I should feel better satisfied——”

“Oh, satisfy yourself, by all means,” interrupted Lord Cheriton irritably. “You are great upon the science of circumstantial evidence. There is the pistol,” taking it out of a drawer in the large writing table. “Do what you like with it.”

“You are not offended with me I hope?”

“No, I am only tired—tired of the whole business, and of the everlasting talk there has been about it. If it is a vendetta, if the hand that killed Godfrey Carmichael is to kill me, and my daughter, and her son—if my race is to be eradicated from the face of this earth by an unappeasable hatred I cannot help my fate. I cannot parry the impending blow. Nor can you or Scotland Yard protect me from my foe, Theodore.”

“Scotland Yard may find your foe and lock him up.”

“I doubt it. But do as you please.”

Theodore's train left Wareham at nine o'clock. There was a still earlier train at seven, by which farmers and other enterprising spirits who wanted to take time by the forelock were accustomed to travel; but to be in time for the nine o'clock train Theodore had to leave Cheriton at a quarter to eight, and to drive to the distant town in the dog-cart made and provided for station work, and drawn by one of two smart cobs kept for the purpose.

He left the park by the West Gate. He had to wait longer than usual for the opening of the gate; and when the chubby-cheeked maid-servant came down the steps with a key in her hand and unlocked the gate there was that in her manner which indicated a fluttered mind.

“Oh, if you please, sir, I'm sorry to keep you waiting so long, but I couldn't find the key just at first, though I thought I'd hung it up on the nail last night after I locked the gate—but I was so upset at my mistress leaving so suddenly—never saying a word about it beforehand—that I hardly knew what I was doing.”

Theodore stopped the groom as he drove through the gate. He had a few minutes to spare, and could afford himself time to question the girl, who had a look of desiring to be interrogated.

“What is this about your mistress leaving suddenly?” he asked. “Do you mean that Mrs. Porter has gone away—on a journey?”

“Yes, indeed, sir. She that never left home before since I was a child—for I’ve known her ever since I can remember, and never knew her to be away for so much as a single night. And the first thing this morning when I was lighting the kitchen fire she opens the door and just looks in and says—‘Martha, I’m going to London. Don’t expect me back till you see me. There’s a letter on the parlour table,’ she says. ‘Let it lie there till it’s called for—don’t you touch it, nor yet the box,’ and she shuts the kitchen door and walks off just as quietly as if she was going to early church, as she has done many a time before it was daylight. I was that upset that I knelt before the stove a good few minutes before I could realize that she was gone—and then I run out and looked after her. She was almost out of sight, walking up the lane towards Cheriton.”

“ Had she no luggage—did she take nothing with her ? ”

“ Nothing. Not so much as a hand-bag.”

“ What time was this ? ”

“ It struck six a few minutes after I went back to the kitchen.”

“ What about the letter—and the box your mistress spoke of ? ”

“ There they are, sir, on the parlour table, where she left them. *I'm* not going to touch them,” said the girl, with emphasis. “ She told me not, and I'm not going to disobey her.”

“ To whom is the letter addressed ? ”

“ Do you mean who it's for, sir ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ It's for his lordship—and it's to lie there till his lordship sends for it.”

“ In that case I may as well give it to his lordship's servant, who can take it up to the house presently.”

“ I don't know if that will be right, sir. She said it was to be called for.”

“ Then we call for it. I, his lordship's cousin, and James, his lordship's groom. Won't that do for you ? ”

“I suppose that will be right, sir,” the girl answered doubtfully. “The letter and the box are both on the table, and I wasn’t to interfere with either of ’em, and I’m not going to it. That’s all I can say.”

The girl was swollen with the importance of her mission as being associated with a mystery, and she was also in lively dread of her very severe mistress, who might come down the lane at any moment and surprise her in some act of dereliction.

Theodore passed her by and went into the sitting-room where he had taken tea with the Kempsters and Cuthbert Ramsay.

A letter lay on the carved oak table in front of the window, and beside the letter there stood a walnut-wood box, eighteen inches by nine. The letter was addressed, in a bold, characteristic hand, to Lord Cheriton. To be called for. The box had a small brass plate upon the lid, and a name engraved upon the plate—

THOMAS C. DARCY,

9th Foot.

No one who had ever seen such a box before could

doubt that this was a pistol case. It was unlocked, and Theodore lifted the lid.

One pistol lay in its place, neatly fitted into the velvet-lined receptacle. The place for the second pistol was vacant.

Theodore took the Colt's revolver from his pocket and fitted it into the place beside the other pistol. It fitted exactly, and the two pistols were alike in all respects—alike as to size and fashion, alike as to the little silver plate upon the butt, and the initials, "T D."

Thomas Darcy ! Darcy was the name of Evelyn Strangway's husband, and one of those pistols which had belonged at some period to Evelyn Strangway's husband had been found in the well in the fruit garden, and the other in possession of Lord Cheriton's *protégée* and pensioner, the humble dependant at his gates, Mrs. Porter.

Theodore changed his mind as to his plan of procedure. He did not send Mrs. Porter's letter to Lord Cheriton by the groom as he had intended, after he himself had been driven to Wareham. His journey to London might be deferred now ; indeed, in his present condition of mind, he was not the

man to interview the authorities of Scotland Yard. He left Mrs. Porter's letter in its place beside the pistol case, and wrote a hasty line to his kinsman at Mrs. Porter's writing table, where all the materials for correspondence were arranged ready to his hand.

“The West Lodge, 8.15. Pray come to me here at once, if you can. I have made a terrible discovery. There is a letter for you. Mrs. Porter has gone to London.”

He put these lines into an envelope, sealed it, and then took it out to the groom, who was waiting stolidly, neatly tickling the cob's ears now and again, with an artistic circular movement of the lash, which brought into play all the power and ease of his wrist.

“Drive back to the house with that note as fast as you can,” said Theodore, “and let his lordship know that I am waiting for him here.”

CHAPTER IX.

“Thy love and hate are both unwise ones, lady.”

“WELL, Theodore, what is your discovery?” asked Lord Cheriton half-an-hour later, the two men standing face to face in Mrs. Porter’s sitting-room, amidst the silence of the summer morning, a gigantic bee buzzing in the brown velvet heart of a tall sunflower, painfully audible to the younger man’s strained ears.

“There is a letter, sir. You had better read that before I say anything,” answered Theodore.

It was years since he had called his cousin sir, not since he had been a schoolboy, and had been encouraged to open his mind upon politics or cricket, over his single glass of claret, after dinner. On those occasions a boyish respect for greatness had prompted the ceremonious address; to-day it came

to his lips involuntarily—as if a barrier of ice were suddenly interposed between himself and the man he had esteemed and admired for so many years of his life.

Lord Cheriton held the letter in his hand unopened, while he stood looking at the pistol case, where both pistols occupied their places—one bright and undamaged, the other rusted and spoilt, as to outward appearance at least. He was ghastly pale, but not much more so than he had looked yesterday after he left Mrs. Porter's cottage.

“That is my discovery,” said Theodore, pointing to the pistols. “I stopped short in my journey to Scotland Yard when I found that case upon the table here. I want to secure Juanita and her son from the possibilities of an insatiable hatred—but I don't want to bring trouble—or disgrace—upon you, if I can help it. You have always been good to me, Lord Cheriton. You have regarded the claims of kindred. It would be base in me if I were to forget that you are of my own blood—that you have a right to my allegiance. Tell me, for God's sake, what I am to do. Trust me, if you can. I know so much already that it will be wisest and best for you to let

me know all—so that I may help you to find the murderer, and to avoid any reopening of old wounds.”

“I doubt if you or any one else can help me, Theodore,” said Lord Cheriton wearily, looking straight before him through the open lattice and across the little flower garden where the roses were still in their plenitude of colour and perfume. “I doubt if all my worldly experience will enable me to help myself even. There is a pass to which a man may come in his life—not wholly by his own fault—at which his case seems hopeless. He sees himself suddenly brought to a dead stop, deep in the mire of an impassable road, and with the words ‘No thoroughfare’ staring him in the face. I have come to just that point.”

“Oh, but there is always an issue from every difficulty for a man of courage and resolution,” said Theodore. “I know you are not a man to be easily broken down by Fate. I am half in the light and half in the dark. It must have been the owner of that pistol who killed Godfrey Carmichael—but how came the case and the fellow-pistol into Mrs. Porter’s possession? Was she that man’s accomplice?”

And who was he, and what was he, that she should be associated with him ? ”

“ You believe that it was a man who fired that pistol ? ”

“ Most assuredly. I believe it was the man whose wife lived for many years at Myrtle Cottage, Camberwell Grove ; the man who called upon a house-agent at Camberwell to make inquiries about his wife, and who called himself by the name she bore in the neighbourhood—the name of Danvers. Danvers may have been only an alias for Darcy, and in that case the man who called upon the agent was the husband of Evelyn Strangway, and the woman who lived for so many years in the seclusion of Myrtle Cottage was old Squire Strangway’s only daughter, and Captain Darcy’s runaway wife.”

“ And you think Tom Darcy murdered my son-in-law ? ” asked Lord Cheriton, with a ghastly smile.

“ I do.”

“ And what do you suppose to have been the motive of that murder ? ”

“ Revenge—revenge upon the man who tempted his wife away from him.”

“ The cur who ill-used and neglected his wife—

whose conduct drove her from her wretched home, and justified her abandonment of him—was never man enough to conceive such a revenge, or to hate with such a hatred. However, in this case we need not enter upon the question of motive. There is one reason why Tom Darcy cannot be suspected of any part in Sir Godfrey's murder. He died nine years ago, and was buried at my expense in Norwood Cemetery."

"Great God! then who could have fired that pistol?"

"The answer to that question is most likely here," replied Lord Cheriton quietly, as he tore open the envelope of Mrs. Porter's letter.

The letter was brief but comprehensive, and all-sufficing.

"You know now who killed your cherished daughter's husband. If she is like me she will carry her sorrow to the grave. If she is like me all her days will be darkened by cruel memories. Your broken promise blighted my life. I have blighted her life—an eye for an eye. I told you three-and-twenty years ago that a day would come

when you would be sorry for having abandoned me. I think that day *has* come.

“EVELYN DARCY.”

Lord Cheriton handed the letter to his kinsman without a word.

“Since you know so much of my history you may as well know all,” he said; “so know the thorny pillow which a man makes for himself when he sacrifices the best years of his life to an illicit love.”

Theodore read those ghastly lines in silence. The signature told all.

“What in Heaven’s name brought Evelyn Strangway to be a lodgekeeper at the entrance of the house where she was born?” he asked, at last. “How could you permit such a life-long humiliation?”

“It was her own desire—it was at her insistence I allowed her to come here. I opposed her fancy with all my power of argument, with all the strength of opposition. I offered to provide her with a home in town or country—at home or abroad—near at hand or at the Antipodes. I offered to

settle four hundred a year upon her—to sink capital to that amount—to make her future and that of—our child—secure against the chances of fate.”

“Your child—Mercy!” exclaimed Theodore.

“Yes, Mercy. My daughter and hers. You understand now why she refused my help. She would take nothing from her father. There was a like perversity in mother and daughter, a determination to make me drink the cup of remorse to the dregs. Oh, Theodore, it is a long and shameful story. To you—for the first time in my life—to you only among mankind these lips have spoken of it. I have kept my secret. I have brooded upon it in the slow hours of many and many a wakeful night. I have never forgotten—I have not been allowed to forget. If time could have erased or softened that bitter memory under other conditions I know not; but for me the case was hopeless. My victim was there, at my gates, a perpetual memento of my folly and my wrong-doing.”

“Strange that a woman of refinement and education should elect to fill so degrading a position!”

“Perhaps only a refined and highly educated

woman could have devised so refined a punishment. 'Let me live near you,' she pleaded; 'let me live at the gate of the park I loved so well when I was a child—let me see you pass sometimes—open the gate for you and just see you go by—without a word, without a look even upon your part. It will be some consolation for me in my lonely, loveless life. I shall know that at least I am not forgotten.' Forgotten? as if it had been possible for me to forget, in the happiest circumstances, even if she had made for herself a home at the farthest extremity of Europe, or in the remotest of our colonies. As it was, her presence embittered the place I loved—the great reward and aim of my life. Her shadow fell across my young wife's pathway—her influence darkened all my days."

He began to pace up and down the little room with a feverish air. He seemed to find a sort of relief in talking of this burden which he had borne so long in secret—borne with a smile upon his lips, suffering that silent agony which strong men have borne again and again in the history of mankind, carrying their silent punishment upon them till the grave revealed the hidden canker, and laid bare the

festering wound which had rankled unsuspected by the world.

“She was cruelly treated by her husband, Theodore. A young and beautiful woman, married to a profligate and a sot. It had been a love-match, as the world calls it—that is to say, a marriage brought about by a schoolgirl's impatience to break her bonds, and a woman's first delight in hearing herself called beautiful. She had flung herself away upon a handsome reprobate ; and three or four years after marriage she found herself alone and neglected in a shabby lodging in one of the squalidest streets off the Strand. I can see the wretched rooms she lived in, to-day, as I stand here—the lodging-house furniture, the dingy curtains darkening the dirty windows looking into the dirty street. What a home for youth and beauty ! ”

He paused, with an impatient sigh, took another turn across the narrow space, and then resumed :

“ Our acquaintance began by accident—under an umbrella. I met them together one night, husband and wife, leaving the little Strand theatre in the rain. I heard him tell her that it was not worth while to take a cab, they were so near home ; and

something in her proud, handsome face and her contemptuous way of replying to him caught my attention and interested me in her. I offered my umbrella, and we all three walked to Essex Street together. Just in that fortuitous way began the alliance which was to give its colour to all my life. The husband cultivated my acquaintance—was glad to meet me at my club—and dined with me as often as I cared to ask him. We used to go to Essex Street after dining together, and finish the evening with her, and so by degrees I came to know all about her—that she was the only daughter of the owner of Cheriton Chase ; that she was very handsome, and very clever, though only half-educated ; that she had offended her father by her marriage, and that she had not brought her husband a penny ; that he neglected her, and that he drank ; and that she was miserable. I came to know this very soon ; I came very soon to love her. She was the first woman I had ever cared for, and I loved her passionately.”

He took another turn, and sighed again, regretfully, despairingly, as one who looks back upon the pallid ghost of a love that has long been dead.

“It began with pity. I was so sorry for her, poor

soul, her wasted life, her slighted beauty. God knows that for a long time I had no thought of sin. Gradually the yearning to see more of her, to bring some brightness and pleasure into her life, became too strong for prudence, and I persuaded her to meet me unknown to her husband. We planned little excursions, innocent enough in themselves, a morning drive and a modest luncheon at Richmond, or Greenwich, or Jack Straw's Castle, a trip to Hampton Court or Windsor by boat or rail. She had hardly any acquaintances in London, and there was little fear of her being recognized. We went to a theatre together now and then, and sat in a dark stage box, happy, talking of an impossible future in the intervals of the performance. We never said as much, but I think we had both a vague idea that Providence would help us—that her husband would die young, and leave us free to be happy together. Yes, we were very fond of each other, very single-hearted in those days. She was only two-and-twenty, remember, and I was still a young man."

Another pause, another sigh, and a look across the roses, as if across the long lapse of years to an unforgotten past.

“Heaven knows how long we might have gone on in this way, without sin, if not without treachery to the husband, who cared so little for his wife that it seemed scarcely dishonourable to deceive him. Our fate was precipitated by circumstances. Darcy surprised a little note of mine, asking Evelyn to meet me at a theatre. He attacked his wife brutally, refused to believe anything except the worst. He called her by names that were new and hideous to her ear, and her soul rose up in arms against him. She defied him, ran out of the house, took a cab, and came to my chambers in the foggy November evening. She came to me helpless, friendless, with no one in this wide world to love her or to protect her, except me. This was the turning-point. Of course she could not stay there to be seen by my clerk and my laundress. I took her to Salisbury that night, and we spent a fortnight moving from village to village along the south coast of Devonshire. My hope was that Darcy would apply for a divorce, and that in less than a year I might make the woman I loved my wife. I rejoiced in the thought of his obscurity and hers. The record of the case would pass unnoticed in the papers, and years hence, when

I should have made a position at the Bar, nobody need know that the wife I loved and honoured was once the runaway wife of another man. I had argued without allowing for the malignity of a cur. Darcy wrote his wife one of the most diabolical letters that ever was penned by man ; he wreaked his venom upon her—upon her, the weaker sinner ; he called her by all the vile epithets in his copious vocabulary, and he told her that she should never have the right to the name of an honest woman, for that he would sooner hang himself than divorce her. And so she was to drag her chain for the rest of his days ; and so she was to pay the bitter price of having trusted her young life to a low-bred scoundrel.”

“Hard luck for both of you,” said Theodore.

“Yes, it was indeed hard luck. If you could know how truly and entirely I loved her in those days—how completely happy we should have been in each other’s society, but for the embittering consciousness of our false position. Cut off by his malevolence from escape by divorce, we naturally hoped for a day when we should be released by his death. His habits were not those which conduce to length of years.

“ We talked of the future—we had our plans and dreams about that life which was to be ours in after days, when I should be making a large income, and when she would be really my wife. With that hope before her she was content to live in the strictest seclusion, to economize in every detail of our existence, to know no pleasure except that of my society. Never did a handsome woman resign herself to a duller or more unselfish existence—and yet I believe for the first few years she was happy. We were both happy—and we were full of hope.

“ I remember the day she first suggested to me that I should buy Cheriton Chase when it came into the market. I was beginning to be employed in important cases, and to get big fees marked upon my briefs, and I had taken silk. I had made my name, and I was saving money. Yet the suggestion that I should buy a large estate was too wild for any one but a woman to have made. From that hour, however, it was Evelyn’s *idée fixe*. She had a passionate love for her birthplace, an overweening pride in her race and name. She urged me to accumulate money—the estate would be sacrificed at half its value, perhaps,—would go for an old song. She

became rigidly economical, would hardly allow herself a new gown, and her keenest delight was in the deposit notes I brought her, as my money accumulated at the Union Bank. She had no idea of investments, or interest for my accumulations. Her notions about money were a child's notions—the idea of saving a large sum to buy the desire of her heart; and the desire of her heart was Cheriton Chase.

“God knows I was honest and earnest enough in those days. I meant to buy that estate, for her sake, if it was possible to be done. I meant to marry her directly she was free to become my wife. My fidelity had not wavered after a union of ten years and more—but Darcy was very far from dying. He had hunted out his wife in her quiet retreat, had threatened and annoyed her, and I had been obliged to buy him off by paying his passage to Canada—where he had been quartered with his regiment years before, and which he pretended would open a new field for him. Our case, so far as he was concerned, seemed hopeless, and I was beginning to feel the darkness of the outlook, when I made Maria Morales' acquaintance.

“It was the old, old story, Theodore. God forbid you should ever go through that hackneyed experience. Just as the old chain was beginning to drag heavily, a new face appeared upon my pathway—a girlish face, bright with promise and hope. I saw the opportunity of a union which would smooth my way to a great position—crown the edifice of my fortune, give me a wife of whom I might be proud. Could I ever have been proud of the woman who had sacrificed her good name for my sake? I was bound to her by every consideration of honour and duty. But there was the fatal stain across both our lives. I could not take her into society without the fear of hearing malignant whispers as we passed. However well these social secrets may be kept, there is always some enemy to hunt them out, and the antecedents of James Dalbrook’s wife would have been public property.

“And here was a beautiful and innocent girl who loved me well enough to accept me as her husband although I was twenty years her senior, loved me with that youthful upward-looking love which is of all sentiments the most attractive to a man who has lived a hard work-a-day life in a hard work-a-day

world. To spend an hour with Maria was to feel a Sabbath peacefulness which solaced and refreshed my soul. I felt ten years younger when I was with her than I felt in my own—home.”

He stopped, with a heart-broken sigh.

“Oh, Theodore, beware of such burdens as that which I laid upon my shoulders; beware of such a chain as I wound about my steps. What a dastard a man feels himself when his love begins to cool for the woman who cast her life upon one chance—who leans upon him as the beginning and end of her existence. I have walked up and down the quiet pathway before Myrtle Cottage for an hour at a stretch, dreading to go in, lest she should read my treason in my face. The break came at last—suddenly. I paltered with my fate for a long time. I carried on a kind of Platonic flirtation with Maria Morales, taking monstrous pains to let her know that I never meant to go beyond Platonics—reminding her of the difference of our ages, and of my almost paternal regard—the vain subterfuge of a self-deluded man. One moment of impulse swept away all barriers, and I left Onslow Square Maria’s engaged husband. Her father’s generosity precipi-

tated matters. Squire Strangway had been dead nearly a year, and the estate was in the hands of the mortgagee, who had been trying to sell it for some time. My future father-in-law was eager for the purchase directly I suggested it to him, and my wife's dowry afforded me the means of realizing Evelyn's long-cherished dream."

"Cruel for her, poor creature."

"Cruel—brutal—diabolical! I felt the blackness of my treason, and yet it had been brought about by circumstances rather than by any deliberate act of mine. I had to go to the woman who still loved me, and still trusted me, and tell her what I was going to do. I had to do this, and I did it—by word of mouth—face to face—not resorting to the coward's expedient of pen and ink. God help me, the memory of that scene is with me now. It was too terrible for words; but after the storm came a calm, and a week later I went across to Boulogne with her, and saw her comfortably established there at a private hotel, where she was to remain as long as she liked, while she made up her mind as to her future residence. The furniture was sent to the Pantechnicon. The *home* was broken up for ever."

“And the daughter, where was she?”

Lord Cheriton answered with a smile of infinite bitterness.

“The daughter had troubled us very little. Evelyn was not an exacting mother. The child’s existence was a burden to her—rendered hateful by the stigma upon her birth, which the mother could not forget. Mercy’s infancy was spent in a Buckinghamshire village, in the cottage of her foster-mother. Mother and daughter never lived under the same roof till they came here together, when Mercy was seven years old.”

“Yet, according to village tradition, Mrs. Porter was passionately fond of her daughter, and broken-hearted at her loss.”

“Village tradition often lies. I do not believe that Evelyn ever loved her child. She bitterly felt the circumstances of her birth—she bitterly resented her unhappy fate; but I believe it was her pride, her deep sense of wrong done to herself, which tortured her rather than her love for her only child. She is a strange woman, Theodore—a woman who could do that deed—a woman who could write that letter. Your friend has fathomed her unhappy

secret. She was a madwoman when she fired that shot. She was mad when she penned that letter. And now, Theodore, I have trusted you as I have never before trusted mortal man. I have ripped open an old wound. You know all, and you see what lies before me. I have to find that woman and to save her from the consequences of her crime, and to save my daughter and my grandson from the hazards of a madwoman's malignity. You can help me, Theodore, if you can keep a cool, clear brain, and do just what I ask you to do, and no more."

He put aside his emotion with one stupendous effort, and became a man of iron, cool, resolute, unflinching.

"I will obey you implicitly," said Theodore.

He had been completely won by his kinsman's candour. Had James Dalbrook told him anything less than the truth he would have despised him. As it was, he felt that he could still respect him, in spite of that fatal error, which had brought such deadly retribution.

"It is early yet," said Lord Cheriton, looking at his watch, and from that to the neat little clock on the mantelpiece, where the hands pointed to twenty

minutes past nine. "The dog-cart is waiting outside. Do you drive to the Priory and put yourself on guard there till—till that unhappy woman has been traced. You can tell Juanita that I have sent you there—that I have heard of dangerous characters being about, and that I am afraid of her being in the house with only servants. My wife shall follow you later, and can stay at the Priory while I am away from home, which I must be, perhaps, for some time. I have to find her, Theodore."

"Have you any idea where she may be gone?"

"For the moment, none. She may have made her way to the nearest river and thrown herself in. Living or dead, I have to find her. That is my business. And when I have found her I have to get her put away out of the reach of the law. *That* is my business."

"God help you to carry it through," said Theodore. "I shall stay at the Priory till I hear from you. Be so kind as to ask Lady Cheriton to bring my portmanteau and dressing-bag in her carriage this afternoon. I may tell Juanita that her mother is coming to-day, may I not?"

"Decidedly! Good-bye. God bless you, Theo-

dore. I know that I may rely upon your holding your tongue. I know I can rely upon your active help if I should need you."

And so with a cordial grasp of hands they parted, Theodore to take his seat in the dog-cart, and drive towards the Priory to offer himself to his cousin as her guest for an indefinite period. It was a curious position in which he found himself; but the delight of being in Juanita's society, of being in some wise her protector, was a counterbalance to the embarrassing conditions under which he was to approach her.

CHAPTER X.

“Love’s reason’s without reason.”

THE cob was all the fresher for the impatience which he had suffered in standing for nearly an hour in the lane, and he bowled the dogcart along the level roads at a tremendous pace. Theodore arrived at the Priory before eleven, and found Juanita sitting on the lawn with her baby in her lap, and the dog Styx at her side. His heart leapt with gladness at the sight of her sitting there, safe and happy, in the morning sunshine, for his morbid imagination had been at work as he drove along, and he had been haunted by hideous visions of some swift and bloody act which might be done by the fugitive madwoman before he could reach the Priory. What deed might not be done by a woman in the state of mind which that woman must have been in when she left the evidence and the confession of her crime upon the table and

fled out of her house in the early morning? A silent thanksgiving went up from his heart to his God as he saw Juanita sitting in the sunshine, smiling at him, holding out her hand to him in surprised welcome. She was safe, and it was his business to guard her against that deadly enemy. He knew now whence the danger was to come—whose the hand he had to fear. It was no longer a nameless enemy, an inscrutable peril from which he had to defend her.

“How early you are, Theodore. Everybody is well, I hope—there is nothing wrong at home?”

“No. Every one is well. Your father is going to London for a few days, and your mother is coming to stay with you during his absence, and I come to throw myself on your hospitality while she is here. His lordship has heard of some suspicious characters in your neighbourhood, and has taken it into his head that it will be well for you to have me as your guest until your brothers-in-law come to you for the shooting. I hope you won't mind having me, Juanita?”

“Mind, no; I am delighted to have you, and my mother, too. I was beginning to feel rather

lonely, and had half decided on carrying baby off to Swanage. Isn't he a fortunate boy to have two doating grandmothers?" She checked herself with a sudden sigh, remembering in what respect the richly-dowered infant was so much poorer than other babies. "Yes, darling," she murmured, bending over the sleeping face, rosy amidst its lace and ribbons as it nestled against her arm. "Yes, there is plenty of love for you upon earth, my fatherless one; and, who knows, perhaps *his* love is watching over you in heaven."

After this maternal interlude she remembered the obligations of hospitality.

"Have you breakfasted, Theodore? You must have left Cheriton very early."

Theodore did not tell her how early, but he confessed to having taken only a cup of tea.

"Then I will order some breakfast out here for you. It is such a perfect morning. Baby and I will stay with you while you take your breakfast."

She called the nurse, who was close by, and gave her orders, and presently the gipsy table was brought out, and a cosy breakfast was arranged upon the shining damask, and Theodore was having his

coffee poured out for him by the loveliest hands he had ever seen, while the nurse paraded up and down the lawn with the newly-awakened baby.

“I cannot understand my father taking an alarm of that kind,” Juanita said, presently, after a thoughtful silence. “It is so unlike him. As if any harm could come to me from tramps or gipsies, or even professional burglars, with half a dozen men-servants in the house, and all my jewels safe at the Bank. Theodore, does it mean anything?” she asked, suddenly. “Does it mean that my father has found out something about the murder?”

He was silent, painfully embarrassed by this home question. To answer it would be to break faith with Lord Cheriton; to refuse to answer was in some manner to break his promise to Juanita.

“I must ask you to let me leave that question unanswered for a few days,” he said. “Whatever discovery has been made it is your father’s discovery, and not mine. His lips alone can tell it to you.”

“You know who murdered my husband?”

“No, Juanita, I know nothing. The light we are following may be a false one.”

He remembered how many lying confessions of crime had been made by lunacy since the history of crime began—how poor distraught creatures who would not have killed a worm had taken upon themselves the burden of notorious assassinations, and had put the police to the trouble of proving them self-accusing perjurers. Might not Mrs. Porter be such an one as these?

“Ah! but you are following some new light—you are on the track of his murderer?”

“I think we are. But you must be patient, Juanita. You must wait till your father may choose to speak. The business is out of my hands now, and has passed into his.”

“And he is going to London to-day, you say—he is going upon that business?”

“I have said too much already, Juanita. I entreat you to ask me no more.”

She gave an impatient sigh, and turned from her cousin to the dog, as if he were the more interesting companion of the two.

“Well, I suppose I must be content to wait,” she said; “but if you knew what I have suffered—what I shall suffer till that mystery is solved—you

would not wonder if I feel angry at being kept in the dark. Has your friend gone back to London ? ”

“ Yes ; but he is coming again before my holiday is over. You like him, I know, Juanita,” he added, looking at her somewhat earnestly.

“ Yes, I like him,” she answered, carelessly, but with a faint blush. “ I suppose most people like him, do they not ? He is so bright and clever.”

“ I am very glad you like him. He is the most valued friend I have—indeed, I might almost say he is the only friend I made for myself at the University. I made plenty of acquaintances, but very few I cared to meet in after-life. Ramsay was like a brother. It would have been a real grief to me if our friendship had not lasted.”

“ He is ambitious, is he not ? ”

“ Very ambitious.”

“ And proud ? ”

“ Very proud ; but it is a noble pride—the pride that keeps a man straight in all his doings—the pride that prefers bread and cheese in a garret to turtle and venison at a parvenu’s table. He is a splendid fellow, Nita, and I am proud of his friendship.”

“Is he very busy, that he should be so determined to leave Dorchester?”

“Yes; he is full of work always. I thought he might have been content to take two or three weeks’ quiet reading in our sleepy old town, but he wanted to get back to the hospital. He will come back for a day or two when the whim seizes him. He has always been erratic in his pleasures, but steady as a rock in his work.”

CHAPTER XI.

“The heaviness and guilt within my bosom
Takes off my manhood.”

LORD CHERITON put the pistol-case under his arm and left the cottage. The case was covered by his loose summer overcoat, and anybody meeting him in the Park might have supposed that he was carrying a book, or might have failed to observe that he was carrying anything whatever. As it happened he met nobody between the West Gate and the house. He went in at the open window of the library, locked the pistol case in one of the capacious drawers of the large writing-table—drawers which contained many of his most important documents, and which were provided with the safest lever locks.

When this was done he went to his wife's morning-room, where she was generally to be found

at this hour, her light breakfast finished, and her newspaper-reading or letter-writing begun.

“Where have you been so early, James?” she asked, looking up at him with an affectionate smile. “I was surprised to hear you had gone out before breakfast.”

He looked at her in silence for a few moments—lost in thought. The beautiful and gracious face turned towards him in gentle inquiry had never frowned upon him in all their years of wedded life. Never had that tranquil affection failed him. There had been no dramatic passion in their love, no fierce alternations of despair and bliss—no doubts, no jealousies. His girlish wife had given herself to him in implicit trustfulness, fond of him, and proud of him, believing in him with a faith second only to her faith in God. For three-and-twenty years of cloudless wedded life she had made his days happy. Never in all those years had she given him reason for one hour of doubt or trouble. She had been his loving and loyal helpmate, sharing his hopes and his ambitions, caring for the people he cared for, respecting even his prejudices, shaping her life in all things to please him.

Great heaven ! what a contrast with that other woman, whose fiery and exacting love had made his life subordinate to hers—whose jealousy had claimed the total surrender of all other ties, of all other pleasures, had cut him off from all the advantages of society, had deprived him of the power to make friends among his fellow-men, had kept him as her bond-slave, accepting nothing less than a complete isolation from all that men hold best in life.

He looked at his wife's calm beauty—where scarce a line upon the ivory-white forehead marked the progress of years—the soft, gazelle-like eyes lifted so meekly to meet his own. He compared this placid face with that other face, handsome, too, after its fashion—long after the bloom of youth had gone—but marked in every feature with the traces of a nervous temperament, a fiery temper, the face of a woman in whose character there were none of the elements of domestic happiness—or, in a word, the face of a Strangway, the daughter of a perverse and unhappy race, from whose line no life of happiness and well-doing had arisen within the memory of man.

“My dear Maria, I was wrong in not leaving a message. I was sent for to Mrs. Porter’s cottage. She has gone away in rather a mysterious manner.”

“Gone away!”

“Yes. That in itself is rather astonishing, you know; but there was something so strange in her manner of leaving that I feel it my duty to look after her. I shall go up to town by the mid-day train. I have other business which may keep me in London for a few days, till the shooting begins, perhaps. I have sent Theodore to the Priory to tell Juanita that you are going to her this afternoon, and that you will stay with her till I come back.”

“That is disposing of me rather as if I were a chattel,” said his wife, smiling.

“I knew you would be glad of a few days’ quiet baby-worship at the Priory, and I knew this house would be dull for you without any visitors.”

“Yes, there is always a gloom upon the house when you are away—a much deeper gloom since last summer. No sooner am I alone than I begin to think of that dreadful night when my poor girl saw her murdered husband lying at her feet. Yes, James, you are right in sending me away. I shall

be happy at the Priory with my darling—and she can never again be happy with me in this house.”

Lord Cheriton breakfasted in his wife's room—it was only an apology for breakfast, for he was too agitated to eat ; but he refreshed himself with a cup of strong tea, and he enjoyed the restfulness of his wife's companionship while he sat there waiting for the carriage which was to take him to Wareham.

“ What makes you so uneasy about Mrs. Porter ? ”
Lady Cheriton asked presently.

“ The suddenness and strangeness of her departure, in the first place. It would have been only natural she should have communicated with you or me before she left. And, in the second place, I have been made uneasy by an observation of Mr. Ramsay's. He has conceived the opinion that Mrs. Porter is not altogether right in her mind—that there is a strain of madness.”

“ Oh, James, that would be dreadful ! ”

“ Yes, it would be dreadful to think of her wandering about alone. The very fact that she has hardly left that cottage for the last twenty years, except to go to church, would make her nervous and helpless among strangers and in a strange town. She would

hardly be able to take care of herself, perhaps—and if, in addition to this, her mind is not quite right——”

“Oh, poor thing! It is terrible to think of it. And you do not even know where she has gone?”

“She told the servant she was going to London. God knows whether that is true or false. She took no luggage, not even a hand-bag.”

“She may have gone to her daughter.”

“To Mercy? Yes, that is an idea. It never occurred to me. She has been so cold and hard about her daughter in all these years — and yet it may be so. She may have relented at last.”

A servant announced the carriage. His Lordship’s portmanteau had been got in, and all was ready.

“Good-bye, Maria. I have no time to lose, as I have inquiries to make and telegrams to dispatch at the station.”

“You will stay in Victoria Street, of course?”

“Yes. I shall telegraph to Mrs. Begby. I am

taking Wilson; I shall be very well taken care of, be sure, dearest."

He kissed her and hurried away. He sighed as he left that atmosphere of perfect peace—sighed again as he thought of the business that lay before him. He had to find her—this murderess—he had to prove that she was mad—if it were possible—and to put her away for the rest of her days in some safe retreat, secure from the hazard of discovery—a hard and bitter task for the man who had once loved her, and whose love had been her destruction.

He made his inquiries of the station-master. Yes, Mrs. Porter had left by the early train. She had taken a second-class ticket for Waterloo.

Lord Cheriton telegraphed to Miss Marian Gray, at 69, Hercules Buildings, Lambeth—

"If your mother is with you when you receive this I beg you to detain her till I come.

“CHERITON.”

His wife's suggestion seemed to him like inspira-

tion. Where else could that desolate woman seek for a shelter but under the roof which sheltered her only child? She was utterly friendless in London and elsewhere — unless, indeed, her old governess Sarah Newton could be counted as a friend.

The Weymouth up train steamed in, and he took his seat in the corner of a first-class compartment, where he was tolerably secure of being left to himself for the whole of the journey, guards and porters conspiring to protect his seclusion, albeit he had not taken the trouble to engage a compartment. His greatness was known all along the line.

He had ample leisure for thought during that three hours' journey, leisure to live over again that life of long ago which had been brought so vividly back to his memory by the events of to-day. He had made it his business to forget that past life, so far as forgetfulness was possible, with that living reminder for ever at his gate. Habit had even reconciled him to the presence of Mrs. Porter at the West Lodge. Her supreme quietude had argued her contentment. Never by so much as one imprudent

word, or one equivocal look, had she aroused his wife's doubts as to her past relations with her employer. She had been accepted by all the little world of Cheriton, she had behaved in the most exemplary manner ; and although he had never driven in at the west gate, and seen her standing there in her attitude of stern humility, without a pang of remorse and a stinging sense of shame, yet that sharp moment of pain being past, he was able to submit to her existence as the one last forfeit he had to pay for his sin. And now he knew that the statue-like calm of her face, as she had looked up at him in the clear light, under the branching beeches, had been only the mask of hidden fires—that through all those years in which she had seemed the image of quiet resignation, of submission to a mournful fate, she had been garnering up her vengeance to wreak it upon the offender in his most unguarded hour, piercing the breast of the father through the innocent heart of the child. He knew now that hatred had been for ever at his doors, that angry pride had watched his going in and coming out, under the guise of humility—that by day and by night hideous thoughts had been busy in that

hyper-active brain, such thoughts as point the way to madness and to crime.

When he had made up his mind to break his promise to Evelyn Darcy, and to marry another woman, fifteen years her junior, he had told himself that the wrench once made, the link once sundered, all would be over. She would submit as other women have submitted to the common end of such ties. She could not deem herself more unfortunate than those other women had been, since his attachment had endured far longer than the average span of illicit loves. He had been patient and faithful and unselfish in his devotion for more than a decade. He would have gone on waiting perhaps had there been a ray of hope; but Tom Darcy had shown a malignant persistency in keeping alive; and even were Tom Darcy dead how bitter a thing it would be for the fashionable Queen's Counsel to enter society with a wife of damaged character. In the old days of hopefulness and fond love they had told each other that the stain upon the past need never be known in that brilliant future to which they both looked forward; but now he told himself that despite their secluded life the facts of that past would ooze

out. People would insist upon finding out who Mr. Dalbrook's wife was. It would not be enough to say, "She is there—handsome, clever, and a lady." Society would peer and pry into the background of her life. Whose daughter was she? Had she been married before? And in that case who was her husband? Where had she lived before her recent marriage? Had she spent her earlier years in the Colonies or on the Continent, or how was it that society had seen nothing of her?

Those inevitable questions would have made his life a burden and her life an agony, James Dalbrook told himself; even had Darcy been so complaisant as to die and leave them free to rehabilitate their position by marriage; but Darcy had shown no disposition towards dying, and now here was a lovely girl with a fortune willing to marry him—a girl to whom his heart had gone out, despite his conscientious endeavour to be faithful to that old attachment.

To-day in his agony of remorse and apprehension, he could recall the scene of their severance as well as if it had happened yesterday.

He had gone home in the chill March twilight,

in that depressing season when the pale spring flowers, daffodils, primroses, and narcissus are fighting their ineffectual battle with the cutting east wind, when the sparrows have eaten the hearts of all the crocuses, and the scanty grass in suburban gardens is white with dust, when the too-early lighted lamps have a sickly look in the windy streets, and the neglected fires in suburban drawing-rooms are more dismal than fireless hearths.

Camberwell Grove was not at its best in this bleak March season. The time had been when the long narrow garden at Myrtle Cottage was carefully kept, and when Evelyn had taken a pride in the old-fashioned flower-borders and the blossoming creepers upon the verandah, but for the last two or three years she had been careless and indifferent, and one jobbing-gardener having left the neighbourhood she had taken no pains to get another in his place; nor had she done any of that weeding and watering and pruning, which had at one time helped to shorten the long light evenings. A weariness of all things had come upon her, tired out with waiting for brighter days.

He had refused Don Jose's pressing invitation to

dine in Onslow Square. He had turned his back upon the warm brightness of newly-furnished drawing-rooms, an atmosphere of hot-house flowers, great rush baskets of tulips, hyacinths and narcissus, low vases of lilies of the valley and Parma violets; and amidst all this brightness and colour the beautiful Spanish girl, with her pale, clear complexion and soft black eyes. He had left his newly-betrothed wife reluctant to let him go, in order to face the most painful crisis that can occur in any man's life; in order to tell the woman who had loved and trusted him that love was at an end between them; that the bond was broken, and his promise of no account.

"I expected you earlier, James," she said, opening the door to him.

It was rarely that the door was opened by a servant when he went home. She was always waiting for his knock.

"Yes, it is late, I know. I have been detained. I have lingered a little on the way—I walked from the West End."

"What, all the way? By the Walworth

Road, that low neighbourhood you dislike so much ? ”

“ I did not care where I walked, Evelyn. I was too miserable to think about my surroundings.”

“ Miserable ! ” she asked, looking at him searchingly, and growing pale as she looked, as if the pallor of his face reflected itself in hers, “ what should make you miserable ? ”

They were standing in the drawing-room, where the moderator-lamp upon the table shone bright and clear upon his troubled face.

“ You have lost your money, James—you have speculated—you won’t be able to buy Cheriton Chase,” she said, breathlessly.

“ Nonsense, Evelyn. Don’t you know that you have the deposit notes for every pound I ever saved locked up in your desk.”

“ Ah, but you might speculate—you may have ruined yourself, all the same.”

“ I have not ruined myself that way, Evelyn. Oh ! for God’s sake forgive me, pity me if you can. I have engaged myself to a girl who loves me, though I am twenty years her senior ; a

girl who is proud of me and believes in me. This engagement means a new and happy life for me, and may mean release for you — who knows? We have neither of us been happy lately. I think we have both felt that the end must come.”

She laid her hand upon his breast, holding the lapel of his coat tightly with her thin white fingers, as if she would pin him there for ever, looking straight into his eyes, with her own eyes dilated and flaming.

“ You are a coward and a traitor ! ” she said, between her clenched teeth. “ You are lying, and you know you are lying. The tie has grown weaker for you, perhaps—not for me. For me every year has strengthened it—for me every hope I have has pointed to one future—the future in which I am to be your wife. You know what my husband’s habits are—you know what his life is worth, as compared with yours. You know that we must be near the end of our probation, that suddenly, without an hour’s warning, we may hear of his death, and you will be free to give me the name and place I have earned by ten years’ fidelity, and patience, and self-

denial. You know this, and that my life is bound up in yours; that I cannot exist without you except as the most miserable of women; that I have not a friend in the world, not a hope in the world, not an ambition in the world but you; and you look me in the face with those cold, cruel eyes, and tell me you have engaged yourself to a girl twenty years your junior, that you are going to cast me off—me, your wife of ten years—more than wife in devotion, more than wife in self-sacrifice——”

“God knows the sacrifice was mutual, Evelyn. If there has been surrender on your side there has been surrender on mine. I have turned my back upon society just at the time when it would have been most enjoyable and most valuable. But I won't even try to excuse myself. I have acted very badly—I deserve the worst you can say of me. I thought I was sure of myself, I thought I was rock; but the hour of temptation came, and I was not strong enough to withstand it. Be generous, Evelyn. Clasp hands and forgive me. Wherever I am and whatever I do your welfare shall be my first, most sacred care. The money I have saved shall be

invested for your benefit—shall be secured to your use and our daughter's after you."

"Money, benefit," she cried, wildly. "How dare you talk to me of money? How dare you put my wrongs in the balance against your sordid money? Do you think money can help me to forget you—or to hate myself less than I do for having loved and trusted you?"

And then followed a paroxysm of passionate despair at the memory of which, after all the intervening years of peace and prosperity, wedded love and deadened conscience, his blood ran cold. He found himself face to face with a woman's frenzy, impotent to comfort or to tranquillize her. There was a moment when he had to exert brute force to prevent her from dashing her brains out against the wall.

All through that long, hideous night he watched by her, and pleaded with her, and guarded her from her own violence. At one time he was on his knees before her, offering to give up the desire of his heart, to break his solemn engagement of a few hours old, and to remain true to her till the end of time; but she spurned his offered sacrifice.

“What, now that I know you love another woman? What, keep you by my side, while I know your heart is elsewhere? What, have you mine by the strength of a chain, like a galley-slave linked to his gaol-companion, knowing that you hate me? Not for worlds—not to be a duchess. No, no, no! The wrong is done—the wrong was in withdrawing your love. There is no such thing as faithfulness from you to me. All is over.”

He argued against himself—implored her to accept his sacrifice.

“I would do anything in this world, pay any price, rather than see such despair as I have seen to-night,” he said, standing in the cold, grey dawn, haggard and aged by the long night of agony, beside the bed where that convulsed form lay writhing, with tear-disfigured face, lips wounded and blood-stained, strained eye-balls, and dishevelled hair.

She was adamant against his pleading.

“You cannot give me back my trust in you. I am not the coarse, common creature you think me. I do not want to keep your dull clay when your heart has gone to another. I will show you that I can live without you.”

This was the beginning of a calmer mood, which he was fain to welcome, though he knew that it was the icy calmness of despair. Before the world was astir in Camberwell Grove she had grown curiously quiet and rational. She had bathed her distorted features and bound up her hair. She was clothed and in her right mind again; and she sat quietly listening while he told her the story of his temptation, and how this new love had crept into his heart unawares, and how an innocent girl's naïve preference had flattered him into infidelity to the love of ten years. She listened quietly while he spoke of the future, trying to make a sunny picture of the new home, in England or abroad, which she was to create for herself.

"You have been far too self-denying," he said; "you have sacrificed even your own comfort to help me to grow rich. You must at least share my prosperity. Money need be no object in your future existence. Choose your new home where you will, and let it be as bright and enjoyable as ample means can make it."

"I will take nothing from you but the bare necessities of existence," she said. "I will go to the

obscurest spot that I can find, and rot there alone, or with my daughter, as you think fit. I may ask one favour of you. Get me out of this house as soon as you can. I was once happy here," she added, hoarsely, looking round the room with an expression that tortured him.

"I will take you across the Channel to-day, if you like. Change of air and scene may do you good. You have lived too long in this place."

"Ten years too long," she answered, with a faint laugh.

He went across to Boulogne with her by the night mail, established her in a private hotel in the Grande Rue, and left her there within an hour of their landing, with a pocket-book containing a hundred pounds in her lap. Nothing could exceed his tenderness in this parting; nor could any man's compassion for a woman he had ceased to love be deeper than his. He was full of thoughtfulness for her future. He implored her to think of him as her devoted friend, to whom her welfare was of the uttermost importance, to call upon him unhesi-

tatingly for any help in any scheme of life which she might make for herself.

“I shall warehouse your furniture at the Pan-technicon, so that wherever you fix your future abode it may be conveyed there,” he said. “We took some pains in choosing those things, and you may prefer them to newer, and even better furniture. Write to me when you have made your choice of a new home.”

“Home,” she echoed, and that was all.

“When you have found that home and settled down there, you will have Mercy to share your life, will you not?” he pleaded. “The child will be a comfort to you.”

“A comfort, yes. She was born under such happy conditions—she has such reason to be proud of her parentage! Mercy—Mercy what? She must have some kind of surname, I suppose, before she is much older. What is she to be called?”

“You are very cruel, Evelyn. What does a name matter?”

“Everything. A name means a history. Should I be here—and you bidding me good-bye—if my

name were Dalbrook? It is just because my name is *not* Dalbrook that you can cast me adrift—like a rotten boat which a man sends down the stream to be stranded on a mudbank, and moulder there piece-meal, inch by inch.”

CHAPTER XII.

“One little flash of summer light,
One brief and passionate dream.”

LORD CHERITON sent his valet and his portmanteau to Victoria Street in a cab, and walked to Hercules Buildings. It was a short distance from the terminus, and the movement was a relief to his troubled brain. He was strangely agitated in approaching the girl whom he had known only as Mercy Porter, who had lived to twenty-seven years of age, almost as a stranger to him, whom he had looked upon in her girlhood with a keen and painful interest, but an interest which he had never betrayed by one outward sign. It was her mother's perversity and wrongheadedness, he told himself, which had necessitated this complete estrangement. Had she consented to bring up her daughter anywhere

else he might have acted in some wise as a father to her. But she had chosen to plant the girl there, at his gates, in the sight of his wife and her child; and he was thus constrained to ignore the tie, to repress every token of interest, every sign of emotion, to act his life-long lie, and play his part of benefactor and patron to the end.

And now he had reason to believe that Mercy had discovered the secret of her birth. Her contemptuous refusal of his bounty could proceed, he thought, from no other cause. She knew that he was her father, and she would accept no boon from a father who had denied her his name and his love.

She resented her mother's wrongs, as well as her own. His heart sank at the thought of standing before her—his daughter and his judge!

The house in Hercules Buildings was decent and clean-looking. The woman who opened the door told him that Miss Gray was at home, and directed him to the second floor back.

"Is she alone?" he asked. "Has there been no one with her this morning?"

“No, sir. She don’t have anybody come to see her once in six months, except Miss Newton.”

Lady Cheriton’s conjecture was not the inspiration he had thought. Mrs. Porter had not made her way here. What if she had doubled back after starting in the train for London—got out at the first station and gone to the Priory—to realize that ghastly apprehension of Theodore Dalbrook’s, and to follow up her scheme of vengeance by some new crime. Once admit that she was mad, and there was no limit to the evil she might attempt and do. His only comfort was in the idea that Juanita’s cousin was there, on the alert to guard her from every possible attack.

He knocked at the door of the back room on the second floor landing, and it was opened by the faded woman he had seen last in her fresh young beauty, a fair, bright face at a rustic casement, framed in verdure. The face was sadly aged since he had looked upon it, and if it was beautiful still it was with the beauty of outline and expression, rather than of youthful freshness and colouring.

The grave sad eyes were lifted to his face as

Mercy made way for him to enter. She placed a chair for him, and stood a little way off, waiting for him to speak. He looked at the small room with infinite sadness. Her neatness and ingenuity had made the best of the poorest means, and the shabby little room had as fresh and gay an air as if it had been a room in an Alpine chalet, or a farmhouse in Normandy. The poor little pallet-bed was hidden by white dimity curtains, the washstand was screened by a drapery of the same white dimity, daintily arranged with bright ribbon bows. There was a shelf of neatly bound books above the mantelpiece, and there were bits of Japanese china here and there, giving a touch of brilliant colour to the cheap white paper on the walls and the white draperies. The room had been furnished by Mercy herself. The chairs were of wicker work, cushioned and decorated by Mercy's clever hands. There was a pine chest of drawers, with a Japanese looking glass hanging above it, and there was a quaint little japanned table of bright vermilion at the side of Mercy's arm chair. That poor little second-floor bedroom, with its one window, and most unlovely outlook, was Mercy's only source of pride. She had

pinched herself to buy those inexpensive chairs, and the luxury of the Japanese glass, the lacquered tea-tray with its Satsuma cups and saucers, and the turquoise and absinthe tinted vases, all those trifling details which made her room so different from the rooms of most workgirls. She had stained and waxed the old deal boards with her own hands, and it was her own labour that kept the floor polished and dustless, and the window panes bright and clear. The natural instinct of a lady showed itself in that love of fair surroundings.

“I hoped to find your mother with you,” said Lord Cheriton.

“Why? I received your telegram, and could not understand what it meant. Is there anything wrong with my mother?”

“She left her home early this morning—suddenly—no one knows why or wherefore. I am intensely anxious to find her.”

“But why? She has been able to take care of herself very well for the last twenty years. You have not been particularly interested in her all that time. Why should you be anxious to-day?”

“Because I have reason to think that all is not well with her—that her mind is not quite right—and I am full of fear lest she should do something rash.”

“God help her,” sighed Mercy, the pale face growing just a shade whiter. “If you had seen much of her in the years that are gone your fears would not have come so late in the day.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that her mind has been unsettled ever since I was old enough to observe and to understand her. I was little more than a child when I found out that she had brooded upon one great sorrow until all her thoughts were warped—all charity and kindly feeling were dead in her—dead or frozen into a dreadful numbness, a torpor of the soul. She never really loved me—me, her only child, who tried very hard to win her love. God knows how I loved her, having no one else to love. There was always a barrier between us—the barrier of some bitter memory. I could never get near her heart.”

He did not answer for some minutes, but stood up looking out of the window at the dreary prospect of slated roof and smoke-blackened chimney-pot,

prospect in which a few red tiles or an old gable-end were as a glimpse of beauty, amidst the all-pervading greyness and cruel monotony of form and hue. He felt a constraint upon him such as he had never felt in all his life before—felt tongue-tied, helpless, paralyzed by a deep sense of shame and self-humiliation before this unacknowledged daughter, who under happier circumstances might have looked up to him and honoured him as the first among men. In this bitter hour the name that he had won for himself in the world, the fortune which his talent had earned for him were as dust and ashes—the bitter ashes beneath the dazzling brightness of the dead sea fruit.

“Why do you stop in this back room, Mercy?” he asked abruptly. “Why do you condemn yourself to look out upon chimney-pots and blackened roofs, when you have all the world to choose from if you like? Why in pity’s name did you refuse my offer of an income?”

“Because I will take nothing from you—nothing—nothing—nothing!”

Her lips closed in a rigid line after that

reiterated word. Her eyes looked straight before her, cold, calm, resolute.

“Why are you so hard upon me?”

“Why? You ask me why—you, who let me live at your gates in meek dependence on your bounty, nameless, fatherless, living a life of miserable monotony with a heart-broken woman in whose frozen breast even maternal love was dead. You who patted me on the head once in half-a-year, and patronized me, and condescended to me, as if I were of another race and of a different clay. You, my father—you who could be content to let me grow from a child to a woman and never once let your heart go out to me, and never once be moved to clasp me in your arms and confess the tie between us. You who saw me come to your fine house and go away, and often pretended not to see me, or passed me with a side glance and a little motion of your hand as if I were a dog that ran by you in the street. You, my father—you, whose friend saw me so friendless and alone that he could lie to me with impunity, knowing there was no one in this world to take my part or to call him to account for his lies. Had

you been different, my fate might have been different."

"He was a villain, Mercy. God knows, I have suffered enough on that score. I would have called him to account, I would have punished him; but I had to think of my wife. I dared not act—there was a monster in my path before which the boldest man sometimes turns coward—publicity. Who was it told you, Mercy—when was it that you discovered my secret?"

"He told me—taunted me with my mother's story. He had guessed it, I think; but though he had no proofs to give me instinct told me that it was true. My mother's life and character had always been a mystery to me. I understood both by the light of that revelation."

"He told you the truth, Mercy. Yes, all my life as regards you was a solemn sham. It was your mother's determination to live at Cheriton, and nowhere else, which made me a stranger to my own child. Had your home been elsewhere—far from my wife and her surroundings—I might have acted in some wise a father's part. I might have acknowledged our relationship—I might have seen

you from time to time in the freedom of paternal intercourse—I could have interested myself in your education, watched over your welfare. As it was I had to play my difficult part as best I might.”

“You would have had to reckon with my mother’s broken heart wherever she had lived,” answered Mercy. “Do you think I could have ever valued your fatherly interest, knowing the measure of her wrong? In my ignorance I looked up to you as our benefactor. You cheated me of my gratitude and respect—you, who were the cause of all our sorrows. I saw my mother’s mind growing more and more embittered as the years went by. My youth was spent with a woman whose lips had forgotten how to smile—with a mother who never spoke a motherly word, or kissed her child with a motherly kiss. And then when love came—or that which seemed love—can you wonder that I was weak and helpless in the hour of temptation—I, who had never known what tenderness meant before I heard his voice, before his lips touched mine? The only happiness I ever knew upon this earth was my happiness with him. It was short enough, God

knows, but it was something. It was my only sunshine — the only year in all my life in which the world seemed beautiful and life worth living. Yes, it was at least a dream of loving and being loved; but it was followed by a bitter waking.”

“He was a scoundrel, Mercy. You were not his first victim; but his youth was past, and I believed in his reform. I should not have asked him to my wife’s house had I not so believed. When I heard that he had tempted you away from your mother I was in despair. I would have made any sacrifice to save you, except the one sacrifice of facing a hideous scandal, except the sacrifice of my social position and my wife’s happiness. Had you alone been in question I might have taken a bolder and more generous course, but you are right when you say I had to reckon with your mother. I might have confessed the existence of my daughter—might have secured my wife’s kindness and sympathy for that daughter—but how could I say to her, The woman who lives beside your gate is the woman who ought to have been my wife, and who for ten years was to

me as a wife, and relied upon my promise that no other woman upon earth should ever occupy that place? I was fettered, Mercy, caught in the toils, powerless to act a manly part. I did what I could. I tried to trace you and Tremayne—failed, and never knew what had become of him till I read of his death in Afghanistan. He was a married man when he crossed your path, separated from his wife, who had not used him over well. It was the knowledge of his domestic troubles that inclined me to hold out the hand of friendship to him at that time. He behaved infamously to you, I fear, my poor girl.”

“He only did what most men do, I suppose, under the same circumstances. He only acted as you acted to my mother. He grew tired of me. Only his weariness came in less than ten years—in less than two. He took me roaming all over the world in his yacht. Those days and nights at sea—or lying off some white city, gleaming against a background of olive-clad hills—were like one long dream of beauty. Sometimes we lived on shore for a little while—in some obscure fishing

village, where there was no one from England to ask who we were. We spent one long winter coasting about between Algiers and Tunis. I could hardly believe that it was winter in that world of purple sea and sky and almost perpetual sunshine. We spent half a year among the Greek islands—we stayed at Constantinople—and sailed from there to Naples. It was at Naples I caught a fever, and lay ill on board the yacht. It was a tedious illness, a long night of darkness and delirium. When I recovered Colonel Tremayne was gone. He had left the yacht on the first day of my unconsciousness, leaving me in charge of a sister of mercy and three sailors. He had sold the yacht, which was to pass into the new owner's possession as soon as I was strong enough to go on shore. He left me a letter, telling me that he had deposited fifty pounds for me at the English bankers where he had been in the habit of cashing cheques. I had been at the bank with him on more than one occasion. He advised me to stay in the South, and get a situation as governess in an Italian family. He was obliged to go back to England on account of

monetary difficulties, but he hoped to be able to meet me later. He did not even take the trouble to tell me where a letter would find him. He had abandoned me at the beginning of a dangerous illness—left me to live or die—friendless in a foreign land.”

CHAPTER XIII.

“Poor wretches that depend
On greatness’ favour dream as I have done,
Wake and find nothing.”

LORD CHERITON heard the story of his daughter’s fate in silence. It was an old and a common story, and any words of reprobation uttered now would have seemed a mockery from the lips of the father who had allowed his daughter’s seducer to go unpunished.

“What did you do in your loneliness?” he asked, after a pause.

“I wandered from village to village for some months, living as the peasants live. I did not take Colonel Tremayne’s advice, and offer myself as a teacher of youth. I did not try to enter a respectable home under a false character. I lived among peasants and as they lived, and my money lasted a

long time. I had always been fond of needlework, so I bought some materials before I left Naples, and I used to sit in the olive woods, or by the sea shore, making baby linen, which I was able to dispose of when my wanderings brought me to Genoa, where I lived in a garret all through the winter after my illness. I remained in Italy for more than a year, and then my heart sickened of the beauty of the sea and sky, the streets of palaces, the orange groves and olive woods, the bright monotony of loveliness. Some of my own misery seemed to have mixed itself with all that was loveliest in that Southern world, and I felt as if grey skies and dull streets would be a relief to me. So I came to London, and found this lodging, and have managed to live—as you see—ever since. I have no wish to live any better. I have only one friend in the world. I have no desire to change. If my mother cared for me and wanted me I would go to her—but she never wanted me in the past, and I doubt if she will ever want me in the future.”

“Your mother is a most unhappy woman, Merey, and she has made her unhappiness a part of my life, and a part of other lives. She left her home this

morning, alone, without giving any one notice where she was going, or why she was going. I am full of fear about her. My only hope was to find her here."

"And not having found her here, what are you going to do? Where will you look for her?"

"I don't know. I am altogether at fault. She had no friends in London, or anywhere else. She had isolated herself most completely. At Cheriton she was respected, but she made no friends. How could she make friends in a place where her whole existence was a secret? Ah, Mercy, have compassion upon me in my trouble—give me something of a child's love, for the burden of my sin is too heavy for me to bear."

He sank into a chair, covering his face with his hands, and she knew that the strong man was crying like a child.

Her heart was touched by his distress, as a woman if not as a daughter.

"I am sorry for you in your trouble," she said, in a low voice, "and I would gladly help you if I could. But I cannot forget my mother's broken heart—the slow torture of long years. I had to look on and see

her suffer, not even knowing the cause of her sorrow, utterly unable to comfort her. Sorrow had hardened her. She was hard to me, a hard task-mistress rather than a mother. And now you tell me she has gone away, no one knows where. What can I do to help you and her ? ”

“ God knows if you can do anything, Mercy,” he answered, looking up at her gently, relieved somewhat by those unaccustomed tears.

He took her hand, which she did not withhold from him.

“ Sit down, Mercy,” he said, “ sit here by my side, and let us consider calmly what we can do. Your mother has no friends to whom she could go, no one, unless it were Miss Newton.”

“ Miss Newton,” cried Mercy. “ What does my mother know of Miss Newton ? ”

“ They were acquainted many years ago, but your mother would hardly go to her now.”

“ My mother knew Miss Newton, my one friend ? ”

“ Yes, long ago. How did you come to know her ? ”

“ She sought me out. It is the business of her

life to seek out those who have most need of her, to whom her friendship can do most good. She heard of me from a girl who lives in this house, and she came to me and invited me to her lodgings, and brightened my life by her kindness. And did she really know my mother, years ago?"

"Yes, more than thirty years ago, when they were both young."

"How strange that is."

"I am thinking, Mercy; I am trying to think what refuge your mother could have found in London? Remember I have to think of her as of one who is scarcely accountable for her actions. I have to think of her as under the influence of one fixed idea—not governed by the same laws that govern other people."

"I am powerless to help you," answered Mercy, hopelessly. "I will do anything you tell me to do—but of all people in this world I am least able to advise you. I know nothing of my mother's life except as I saw it at Cheriton—one long weariness."

"You shall know all by-and-by; all. I will stand before you as a criminal before his judge. I will lay bare my heart to you as a penitent before

his father-confessor—and then perhaps, when you have heard the whole story, you will take compassion upon me—you will understand how hard a part I had to play—and that I was not altogether vile. I will say no more about your life here, and your future life, as I would have it, until that confession has been made. Then it will remain for you to decide whether I am worthy to be treated in some-wise as a father.”

She sat in silence, with her head bent over her folded hands. He looked at the dejected droop of the head, the grey threads in the auburn hair, the hollow cheek, the attenuated features and wan complexion, and remembered how brilliant a creature she had been in the first bloom of her beauty, and with what furtive apprehensive glances he, her father, had admired that girlish face. She was handsomer in those days than ever her mother had been, with a softer, more refined loveliness than the Strangway type. And he had let this flower grow beside his gate like a weed, and be trampled under foot like a weed; and now the face bore upon it all the traces of suffering, the lines about the mouth had taken the same embittered look that he remem-

bered only too well in Evelyn Darcy, that look of silent protest against Fate.

He watched her for some minutes in an agony of remorse. She was his daughter, and it had been his duty to shelter her from the storms of life—and he had let the storms beat upon that undefended head, he had let her suffer as the nameless waifs of this world have to suffer, uncared for, unavenged.

If she should ever be brought to forgive him, could he ever forgive himself?

But he had nearer anxieties than these sad thoughts of that which might have been and that which was. He had the missing woman to think of, and the evil that might come to herself or others from her being at large. He had to speculate upon her motive in leaving Cheriton.

Perhaps it was only a natural result of his interview with her yesterday afternoon, when he had shown her the pistol, and told her where it had been found, that pistol which he and she knew so well—one of a pair that had been in her husband's possession at the time of her marriage—which had been pledged while they were living in Essex Street, and when their funds were at the lowest. She had

kept the duplicate, with other duplicates which Darcy's carelessness abandoned to her—and afterwards some womanish apprehension of danger in the somewhat isolated cottage in Camberwell Grove—some talk of burglarious attacks in the neighbourhood—had induced her to redeem the pistols, and they had been kept in their case on the table beside her bed for years. No burglar had ever troubled the quiet cottage, where there was neither plate-chest nor jewel-case to tempt an attack. The pistols had never been used. They had been packed up with other things and stored in the Pantechnicon, and James Dalbrook had forgotten the existence of Captain Darcy's revolvers till the builder's foreman showed him the pistol that had been found in the well. Then there came back upon him, in a flash, the memory of the case that had stood beside his bed, and the fact that the pistols had been sent down to Cheriton with Mrs. Darcy's other goods. That pistol could not have passed out of her possession without her knowledge and consent. If hers was not the hand that pulled the trigger, she must, at least, have furnished the weapon, and she must have known the murderer.

He told her as much as this, yesterday afternoon, when he showed her the pistol. She heard him in dogged silence, looking at him with wide-open eyes, in which the dilatation of the pupil never altered. She neither admitted nor denied anything. He could extort no answer from her, except some scornful and evasive retort. And so he left her in despair, having warned her that discovery was now a question of time. The finding of the pistol would put the police on the right track, and link by link the chain of circumstantial evidence would be fitted together.

“You had better tell me the truth, and let me help you, if I can,” he told her.

She had acted upon his warning perhaps, but without his help. It was like her perverse nature to go out into the world alone, to make a mysterious disappearance just at the time when suspicion might at any moment be directed towards her, just when it was most essential that there should be not the slightest deviation from the sluggish course of her every-day life.

Lord Cheriton started up suddenly.

“Yes, that is at least an idea,” he muttered.
“Good-bye, Mercy. I have thought of a place where

your mother might possibly go—a place associated with her past life. It is a forlorn hope, but I may as well look for her there. Wherever and whenever I find her you will come to her, will you not, if she should need your love ? ”

“ Of course I will go to her—and if she has no other shelter I can bring her here. I should not be afraid to work for her.”

“ It is cruel of you to talk of working for her. You know that the want of money has never been an element in her troubles. She might have lived an easy and refined life among pleasant people if she would have been persuaded by me. As it was, I did what I could to make her life comfortable.”

“ Yes, I know she had plenty of money. She gave me expensive masters, as if she had been a woman of fortune. I used to wonder how she could afford it. We lived very simply, almost like hermits, but there seemed always money for everything she wanted. Our clothes, our furniture, and books seemed far too good for our station. I used to wonder who and what we were ; and I have been asked questions sometimes about my former home. What did I remember of my childhood ? Where

had I lived before my father died ? I could tell people nothing. I only remembered a cottage among fields, and the faces of the woman who nursed me and her children who played with me. I remembered nothing but the cottage, and the great cornfields, and the lanes and hedgerows, till one summer day my mother came in a carriage, and took me on a journey by the railroad—a journey that lasted a long time, for we had to wait and change trains more than once—and in the evening I found myself at Cheriton. That was all of my life that I could recall, and I did not even know the name of the woman with whom I lived till I was seven years old, or of the village near her cottage.”

“ You were hardly used, Mercy ; but it was not all my fault.”

He would not tell her that it was his wish to have her reared at Myrtle Cottage, where he would have watched her infancy and childhood ; he would not tell her that it was the mother’s sensitiveness, her resentful consciousness of her false position, which had banished the child.

“ You will come to me whenever I summon you, Mercy ? ” he said.

“ Yes, I will come.”

He held out his hand, and she gave him hers, which was cold as death. He drew her to his breast, and kissed the pallid, care-worn forehead, and so they parted, father and daughter, the daughter acknowledged for the first time at seven-and-twenty years of age.

Lord Cheriton hailed the first hansom he found upon his way, and told the man to drive him to Camberwell Grove.

The neighbourhood through which he went was curiously unfamiliar after the changes and forgetfulness of twenty years; and yet it was curiously familiar to him, and brought back the memory of that dead time, when a man who was himself, and yet not himself, had gone to and fro that road until its every shop-front and every street corner seemed engraven upon his brain.

It is a busy, teeming world—a world of seething humanity, jostling, striving, anxious, hollow-cheeked and eager-eyed. He had chosen to plant his hidden Eden upon “ the Surrey side,” and had gone to and fro by that squalid highway with a contented spirit, because it was a world in which he was least likely

to meet any of his professional brotherhood. What other barrister in decent practice, what other Queen's Counsel, above all, was likely to pitch his tent at Camberwell? There might be old-fashioned men who would be content to grow their early cucumbers, and gloat over their pines and peaches in some citizen's paradise on Clapham Common. There might be men who would resign themselves to life at Wandsworth; but where was the spirit so lowly within the precincts of the Lamb who would stoop to live in a place which was accessible only by the Elephant and Castle and the Walworth Road? Do not the very names of those places stink in the nostrils of gentility? The Elephant has never held up his trunk since the glories of the Queen's Bench departed, since Ichabod was written on those walls against which Lord Huntingtower played rackets, and in whose shadow so many of Earth's great ones have paced up and down in the days when the noble debtor was still a person apart and distinguished, not amenable to the laws which govern the bankrupt trader.

He had borne with the Walworth Road because it lay so far out of gentility's track. The very odour

of the neighbourhood was familiar—the reek of cooked meats and stale vegetables, blended with all-pervading fumes of beer. But there were numerous changes. He missed familiar shops and well-remembered features. All that had been shabby of old looked still shabbier to-day. How often he had tramped those pavements, economizing the cost of a cab, and not caring to rub shoulders with the habitués of the knife-board on Atlas or Waterloo. The walk had suited him. He could think out the brief read overnight as he tramped to Westminster in the morning. How well he remembered the cool breath of the river blowing up the Westminster Road on bright spring mornings, when the flower girls were offering violets and primroses at the street corners. How well he remembered the change to a cleaner and a statelier world when he had crossed the bridge—the solemn grandeur of Westminster Hall, the close, sickly atmosphere of the crowded courts. Looking back he wondered how he bore the monotony of that laborious life, forgetting that he had been borne up and carried along by his ambition, always looking onward to the day when his name and fortune should be made,

and he should taste the strong wine of success. He remembered what an idle dream Evelyn's idea of buying the Cheriton estate had seemed to him when first she mooted it; how he had talked of it only to indulge her fancy, as one discusses impossible things with a child; and how by slow degrees the notion of its feasibility had crept into his mind; how he had begun to calculate the possibilities of his future savings; how he had covered stray half-sheets of paper with elaborate calculations, taking pleasure in the mere figures as if they were actual money. He remembered how, when he had saved five thousand pounds, a rabid eagerness to accumulate took hold of him, and with what keen eyes he used to look at the figures on a brief. He had caught the infection of Evelyn's sanguine temper, and of Evelyn's parsimonious habits. They used to hang over his bank-book sometimes of an evening, as Paolo and Francesca hung over the story of Launcelot, calculating how much could be spared to be placed on deposit, how little they could contrive to live on for the next quarter. As the hoard increased Evelyn grew to grudge herself the smallest luxury, a few flowering plants for the drawing-room, a day's hire of the

jobbing gardener, a drive in a hansom to Richmond or Greenwich, little pleasures that had relieved the monotony of their isolation.

“My father cannot live many years,” she told James Dalbrook, “and when he dies the estate will have to be sold. I have often heard him say so.”

Mr. Dalbrook went on a stolen journey to Cheriton, and saw every bit of the estate which he could get to see. He was careful to say nothing of this expedition to Evelyn lest she should want to go with him, as he felt that her presence would have been a difficulty. Some one might have recognized the Squire’s young daughter in the mature woman.

He went back to London passionately in love with the property, which he remembered as one of the paradises of his boyhood, in the days when he had been fond of long excursions on foot to Corfe, or Swanage, or the great sunburnt hills by the sea. He saw Cheriton Chase now with the entranced eyes of an ambitious man to whom territorial possession seemed the crowning glory of life.

He had saved ten thousand pounds, very little compared with the sum which would be required; but he told himself that when he had amassed

another ten he might feel secure of being able to buy the estate, since it would be easy to raise seventy per cent. of the purchase money on mortgage. He began to see his way to the realization of that dream. He would have to go on living laborious days—to go on with those habits of self-denial which had already become a second nature—even after the prize was won; but he saw himself the owner of that noble old house, amidst a park and woodland that were the growth of centuries; and he thought of the delight of restoring and improving and repairing, after fifty years of slipshod poverty and gradual decay.

And now, as the hoard increased to twelve, fifteen, eighteen thousand, James Dalbrook began to talk to his companion of their future ownership of Cheriton as a certainty. They planned the rooms they were to occupy; they allotted their small stock of furniture about the old mansion house—things they had bought by slow degrees in the happy hunting-grounds of Wardour Street and the Portland Road, and which were all good of their kind. They discussed the number of servants that they could manage to carry on with for the first few years, while

economy would still be needful. It was understood between them, though rarely spoken about, that Tom Darcy would be dead before that fruition of their dreams. He had been sent off to Canada, a broken man. Who could doubt that a few years more would see the end of that worthless existence? And then the bond between those two who had held to each other so faithfully would be realized, and Evelyn could go back to the house in which she was born, its proud and happy mistress.

She had fed upon those dreams, lived upon them, had thought of little else in her solitary days, in the isolation of her home. She had put away her child with stern resolve that no difficulty should arise out of *that* existence when she came to take her place in society as James Dalbrook's wife. She never meant to acknowledge the daughter born at Myrtle Cottage. She would do her duty to the child somehow ; but not in that way.

Lord Cheriton remembered all these things as the cab rattled along the Walworth Road. Our waking thoughts have sometimes almost the rapidity of our dreams. He surveyed the panorama of the past ; recalled the final bitterness of that meeting at

Boulogne, when he went over to see Mrs. Darcy, and when he had to tell her that he was master of Cheriton Chase, by the help of his wife's dowry, and that he had begun life there on a far more dignified footing than they two had contemplated.

She received the announcement with sullen silence, but he could see that it hurt her like the thrust of a sword. She stood before him with a lowering brow, white to the lips, her thin fingers twisting themselves in and out of each other with a convulsive movement, and one corner of the bloodless under lip caught under the sharp white teeth fiercely.

“Well,” she said at last, “I congratulate you. Cheriton has a new master; and if the lady of the house is not the woman whose shadow I used to see there in my dreams—it matters very little to you. You are the gainer in all ways. You have got the place you wanted; and a fair young wife instead of a faded—mistress.”

She lifted up her eyes, pale with anguish, and looked at him with an expression he had never been able to forget.

He was silent under this thrust, and then, after

a troubled pause, he asked her if she had made up her mind where her future days were to be spent. He was only desirous to see her settled in some pretty neighbourhood, in the nicest house that she could find for herself, or that he could choose for her.

“Do not let money be any consideration,” he said. “My fees are rolling in very fast this year, and they are big fees. I want to see you happily circumstanced, with Mercy.”

“There is only one place I care to live in,” she answered, “and that is Cheriton Chase.”

He told her, with a sad smile, that Cheriton was the only place that was impossible for her.

“It is not impossible. Do you think I want to be a fine lady, or to tell people that I was once Evelyn Strangway? I only want to live upon the soil I love—and to see you, sometimes, as you go past my door. There is the West Lodge, now—one of the most picturesque old cottages in England. I loved it when I was a girl. Sally Newton and I used to picnic there, when my father and I were not on speaking terms. Who is living in that cottage now?”

“ One of the gardeners.”

“ Turn out the gardener and let me live there.”

He rejected the idea as preposterous, degrading, that she should live at the lodge gates, she who had once been the Squire's daughter.

“ Do not talk to me of degradation,” she answered, bitterly. “ There will be no degradation for me in living at your gates, now that you and I are strangers. My degradation belongs to the past. Nothing in the future can touch me. I am nameless henceforward, a nullity.”

“ But if you should be recognized there ? ”

“ Who is there to recognize me ? Do you think there is one line or one look of Evelyn Strangway's sixteen - year - old face left in my face to-day ? ”

Knowing the portrait in the hall at Cheriton he was fain to confess that the change was complete. It would have been difficult for any one to find the lines of that proud young beauty in the careworn features and sunken cheeks of the woman who stood before him now. The months that had gone by since their parting had aged her as much as if they had been years.

“ If your husband should find you there ? ”

“ Not likely ! It is the very last place in which he would look for me ; and the chances are against his ever returning to England.”

“ Why is your mind set upon living at Cherriton ? ”

“ Why ? Because I have dreamt and thought of that place till my love for it has become almost a disease ; because I have not the faintest interest in any other spot upon earth. I don't care how I live there. I have no pride left in me. Pride, self-respect, care for myself died a sudden death one day you know of, when I found that you had ceased to care for me, when I awoke from a long dream and knew that my place in life was lost. I shall be content to vegetate in that cottage—and—and if you think I ought to have Mercy with me, why Mercy can be there too. I shall be Mrs. Jones, or Mrs. Brown, and there can be no particular reason why Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Brown should not have a daughter.”

She was so earnest, so intent, so resolute upon this and nothing else than this, that he was constrained to yield to her wishes, and once having yielded, he

did all in his power to make her life comfortable and free from humiliation. He had the cottage as tastefully restored as if he had been going to occupy it himself; he opened an account for Mrs. Porter at a Dorchester Bank, and paid in four hundred pounds to her credit, and he told her that the same amount would be paid in yearly on the 1st of January. There should be nothing uncertain or pinched in her circumstances.

This being done, he resigned himself as best he might to bear the burden of that unwelcome presence at his gates. He and the woman who was to have been his wife rarely spoke to each other during those long slow years in which the master of Cheriton grew in honour and dignity and in the respect of his fellow-men. He whose career Evelyn Darcy had watched from the very dawn of success was now a personage, a man of mark in his native county, a man who could afford to hold out the hand of friendship to his less distinguished relatives, and who could afford to confess himself the son of a small shopkeeper in the county town.

Lady Cheriton had been inclined to interest herself in the lonely woman at the West Lodge. She

was impressed by the unmistakable refinement of Mrs. Porter's appearance, and wanted to befriend her; but Lord Cheriton had forbidden any friendly relations between his wife and the lodge-keeper, on the ground that she was a woman of very peculiar temper, that she would resent anything like patronage, and that she would infinitely prefer being left alone to being taken up or petted. The tender-hearted Maria, always submissive to the husband she adored, had obeyed without question; but some years after, when Mercy was growing up and being educated by the best masters available in the neighbourhood, Lady Cheriton had taken a fancy to the hard-worked girl, and had interested herself warmly in her progress; and thus it had happened that although Mrs. Porter never was known to cross the threshold of the great house, her daughter went there often, and was made much of by Lady Cheriton, and admired by Juanita, whose accomplishments were still in embryo, while Mercy was far advanced in music and modern languages.

"I suppose her mother means her to go out as a governess by-and-by," Lady Cheriton told her hus-

band. "She is over-educated for any other walk in life, and in any case she is over-worked. I feel very sorry for her when I see how tired she looks sometimes, and how anxious she is about her studies. Juanita must never be allowed to toil like that."

Lord Cheriton remembered all that had happened with reference to the woman who called herself Mrs. Porter, in all these long years—his daughter Juanita's life-time. She had seen the funeral trains of his infant sons pass through the gate beside her cottage—she had seen the little coffins covered with snow-white flowers, and she must have known the bitterness of his disappointment. She had lived at the West Lodge for all these years, and had made no sign of a rebellious heart, of anger, jealousy, or revengeful feeling. He had believed that she was really content so to live; that in granting what she had asked of him he had satisfied her, and that her sense of wrong was appeased. At first he had lived in feverish apprehension of some outbreak or scene—some revelation made to the wife he loved, or to the friends whose esteem he valued; but as the years went by without bringing him any trouble of

this kind, he had ceased to think with uneasiness of that sinister figure at his gates.

And now by the light of the hideous confession which he carried in his breast pocket he knew that in all those years she had been cherishing her sense of wrong, heaping up anger and revenge and malice and every deadly feeling engendered of disappointed love, against the day of wrath. Could he wonder if her mind had given way under that slow torture, until the concealed madness of years culminated in an act of wild revenge—a seemingly motiveless crime? Heaven knows by what distorted reasoning she had arrived at the resolve to strike her deadly blow there rather than elsewhere. Heaven knows what sudden access of malignity might have been caused by the spectacle of the honeymoon lovers and their innocent bliss.

The cab had turned into Camberwell Grove, and now he asked himself if it were not the wildest fancy to suppose that she might have gone back to Myrtle Cottage, or that she might be hanging about the neighbourhood of her old home. The cottage was in all probability occupied, and even if she had wandered that way she would most likely have come

and gone before now. The idea had flashed into his mind as he sat in Mercy's room, the idea that in her distracted state all her thoughts might revert to the past, and that her first impulse might lead her to revisit the house in which she had lived so long.

CHAPTER XIV.

“The love of these is like the lightning spear,
And shrivels whom it touches. They consume
All things within their reach, and, last of all,
Their lonely selves.”

THE cottage was to be let. A board offering it upon a repairing lease announced the fact.

Lord Cheriton opened the familiar gate. The very sound with which it swung back as he passed recalled a life that was gone, that had left nothing but an exceeding bitter sorrow. How weedy and dejected the narrow garden looked in the sunshine—how moss-grown the gravel path which he and Evelyn had once taken such pains to weed and roll, in those early days when that modest suburban retreat seemed a happy home, and the demon of ennui had not yet darkened their threshold.

He entered the well-remembered porch over which the Virginia creeper hung in rank luxuriance. The house was not unoccupied, for slipshod feet came along the passage at the sound of the bell, and he heard children's voices in the back premises.

A slatternly woman, with a year-old baby on her left arm, opened the door.

"Has a lady called here this morning?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, there is a lady here now—in the drawing-room," the woman answered, eagerly. "I hope you belong to her, for I've been feeling a bit nervous about her, with me and the children alone in the house, and my husband not coming back till night time. I'm afraid she's not quite right in her head."

"Yes, I belong to her. I have come to fetch her."

He went into the drawing-room—the room that had looked pretty and picturesque enough in those unforgotten days—a small room furnished with quaint old secretaire and bookcase, Chippendale chairs, and a carved oak table, a pair of old blue

and white jars on the top of a dark mahogany bureau, a high, brass fender that used to glitter in the fire-light, sober brown damask curtains, and half-a-dozen Bartolozzi engravings of rustic subjects, in neat oval frames—a room that always looked like a Dutch picture.

Now that room was a scene of squalor and desolation. For furniture there was nothing but a shabby Pembroke table, wanting two castors, and two old cane-seated chairs, in each of which the cane was broken and bulging. A dilapidated doll, in a ragged red gauze frock, sprawled amidst the dirt on the bare floor, and a greasy rug lay in front of the fireless hearth.

Mrs. Porter was sitting with her elbows on the table, and her head resting on her clasped hands. She did not notice Lord Cheriton's approach till he was standing close beside her, when she looked up at him.

At first her gaze expressed trouble and bewilderment; then her face brightened into a quiet smile, a look of long ago.

"You are earlier than usual, James," she said, holding out her hand.

He took the hand in his ; it was hot and dry, as if with a raging fever. It was the hand of a murderer ; but it was also the hand of his victim, and he could not refuse to take it.

“ Was your work over so soon to-day ? ” she asked. “ I’m afraid it will be ever so long before dinner will be ready, and the house is all in a muddle—everything wretched ”—looking about her with a puzzled air. “ I can’t think what has happened to the rooms,” she muttered. “ Servants are so troublesome.”

She passed her hand across her forehead, as if her head were paining her, and then looked at him helplessly.

“ You are ill, Evelyn,” he said, gently.

It was twenty years since he had called her by the name that had been so often on his lips in this house. It was almost as if the very atmosphere of the house, even in its desolation, recalled the old link between them, and made him forgetful of what had happened in Dorsetshire.

“ No. I have a headache, that is all. I shall set to work presently and make everything comfortable for you. Only I can’t find Mary—I can’t get

on without Mary. I don't like the look of that charwoman—a wretched, untidy creature—and I don't know what she has done with the furniture. I suppose she moved it in order to clean the rooms. It is just like their tricks, clearing out the furniture and then dawdling ever so long before they begin to scrub the floors.”

He looked at her earnestly, wondering whether she was pretending, whether she had repented that written acknowledgment of her crime, and was simulating madness. No, it was real enough. The eyes, with their dull fixed look and dilated pupils, the troubled movements of the hands, the tremulous lips, all told of the unsettled brain. There was but one course before him, to get her madness established as an accepted fact before there was any chance of her crime being discovered.

“Do not trouble about anything,” he said, gently. “I will get some of the furniture brought back presently, and I will get you a servant. Will you wait quietly here, while I see about two or three small matters?”

“Yes, I will wait, but don't be long. It seems

such a long while since yesterday," she said, looking round the room in a forlorn way, "and everything is so strangely altered. Don't be long, if you *must* go out."

He promised to return in half an hour, and then he went out and spoke to the woman.

"How did she come here, and when?"

"She walked up to the door. It was just dinner-time—half-past twelve o'clock. I thought it was some one to see the house, so I let her in without asking any questions, and I showed her all the rooms, and it was some time before I saw she was wrong in her head. She looked about her just as people mostly do look, and she was very thoughtful, as if she was considering whether the place would suit. And then after she'd been a long time looking at the rooms and the garden, she went back into the drawing-room, and sat down at the table. I told her I should be glad if she could make it convenient to leave, as I had my washing to do. But she said she lived here, this was her home, and she told me to go away and get on with my work. She gave me such a scare that I didn't know how to answer her. She spoke very mild, and I could see that she was a

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lady ; but I could see that she was out of her mind, and that frightened me, for fear she should take a violent turn, and I all alone in the house with those young children. I was afraid to contradict her, so I just let her please herself and sit in the drawing-room alone, while I got on with my bit of washing, and kept the children well out of the way. I never felt more thankful in my life than when you rang the bell."

"I am going as far as the post-office to send off some telegrams, and I want you to take care she doesn't leave this house while I'm away," said Lord Cheriton, emphasizing his request with a sovereign.

"Thank you kindly, sir. I'll do my best. I'm sure I'm sorry for her with all my heart, poor dear lady."

"And I want you to give me the use of this house for to-day—and possibly for to-night, if by any chance I should not be able to get her away to-night."

"Yes, sir, you are free and welcome to the house as far as it's mine to give leave—and it's been empty too long for there to be much chance

of a tenant turning up between now and to-morrow."

"Very good. Then I shall send in a little furniture—just enough to make her comfortable for a few hours—and when I come back you can get her something to eat, and make her some tea."

"Yes, sir. You won't be gone long, I hope, for fear she should turn violent?"

"She will not do that. She has never been violent."

"I am very glad to hear that. Appearances are so deceitful sometimes when folks are wrong in their heads."

Lord Cheriton had told the cabman to wait. He got into the cab and drove to the nearest upholsterer's, where he hired a table, a comfortable sofa, a couple of chairs, a small square carpet, and some pillows and blankets, in the event of Mrs. Porter having to bivouac in Myrtle Cottage. He meant her only to leave that shelter for a place of restraint, under medical care.

This done, he went to the post-office and telegraphed first to Marian Gray, Hercules Buildings :

“Your mother is at Myrtle Cottage, Camberwell Grove, and very ill. Go to her without delay.—
CHERITON.”

His second telegram was to Dr. Mainwaring, Welbeck Street :—

“Meet me as soon as possible at Myrtle Cottage, Camberwell Green, and send a trained nurse, experienced in mental cases, to the same address. I want your advice upon a case in which time is of vital importance.”

He sent another telegram to another medical man, Dr. Wilmot, also an old acquaintance, and a fourth to Theodore Dalbrook, at the Priory :—

“Mrs. Porter is in London, and in my care. You need have no further apprehension.”

He was back at Myrtle Cottage within the half hour, and was able to direct the men who had just brought a small van containing the furniture. He saw the things carried into the room that had been the dining-room, which was empty—the policeman’s family preferring to camp in the kitchen—and had

them arranged there with some appearance of comfort. Then he went back to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Porter was standing at the window, staring at the weeping-ash.

“I didn’t know the tree was so big,” she muttered.

“The dining-room is in better order,” he said, gently, “will you come and sit there, while they get you some tea?”

“Yes, James,” she answered, meekly, and then she added, with almost the voice and manner of twenty years ago, “tell me about your day.”

She followed him into the other room, and seated herself opposite him, looking at him expectantly. “Tell me about your day in the law courts. Was it dull or interesting? Had you any great case on? I forget. I forget.”

She had always questioned him on his return from the law courts: she had read the reports of all his cases, and all his rivals’ cases, interesting herself in everything that concerned his career. And now there was so much of the past in her manner that his heart ached as he listened to her. He could not humour her delusion.

“I have sent for your daughter,” he said gravely, thinking that name might bring her back to a sense of the present time. “She will be here before long, I believe. I hope you will receive her kindly.”

“Why have you sent for her?” she cried, vexed and startled. “She is very well where she is—happy and well. The nurse told me so in her last letter. I can’t have her here. You know that, James,—you know how people would talk by-and-by—how they would ferret out the truth—by-and-by, when we want to stand clear of the past——”

“Evelyn, the past is long past, and our child is a woman—a sorrowful woman. I want you to take her to your heart again, if you have any heart left in you.”

“I have not,” she cried, with a sudden change, appalling in its instantaneousness. “My heart died within me twenty years ago, when you broke it; in this house, yes, in this house, James Dalbrook, God help me! I have been dreaming! I thought I was living here again in the old time, and that you had come home to me, as you used to come, before

you broke your promise and abandoned me to marry a rich young wife. Heart! No, I have a fiery scorpion here, where my heart used to be. Do you think if I had had a heart I could have killed *him*—that young man who never injured me by so much as one scornful word? It was the thought of your daughter that maddened me—the thought of her happiness, the sound of the church bells and the cheering, and the sight of the flags and garlands and laurel arches—while *my* daughter, your nameless, unacknowledged child, was an outcast, and I who should have been your wife, and the happy mother of just as happy a bride, I was living in that silent solitary cottage alone and unloved—upon the land where my father and his forefathers had been owners of the soil. I had dreamed the dream and you had realized it. All through those moonlight nights I was awake and roaming about in the park, from midnight till dawn, thinking, thinking, thinking, till I felt as if my brain must burst with the agony of thought. And then I remembered Tom Darcy's pistols, and I took one of them with me of a night. I hardly knew why I carried that pistol about with me, but I felt a necessity to kill something. Once I

was near shooting one of the red deer, but the creature looked at me with its plaintive eyes, so bold and so tame in his sense of security, and I fondled him instead of killing him. And then I took to prowling about by the house, and I saw those two in the lamp-lit room, in their wedded happiness—their *wedded* happiness, James, not such a union as ours, secret, darkened by a cloud of shame. I saw your daughter in her bright young beauty, the proud, triumphant wife : and then a devilish thought took hold of me—the thought of seeing her widowed, broken-hearted ; the thought that I might be her evil Destiny—that just by stretching out my arm and pulling a trigger I could bring down all that pride into the dust—could bring youth and beauty down to my level of dull despair.”

“ It was a devilish thought.”

“ It was ; but it was my thought all the same ; for three days and three nights it was never absent from my mind. God knows how I got through the common business of the day—how the few people with whom I came in contact did not see murder in my face ! I watched and waited for my opportunity ; and when the moment came I did not waver.

There are old people at Cheriton who could tell you that Evelyn Strangway at fifteen years old was as good a shot as either of her brothers. My hand had not forgotten its cunning; and your daughter was a widow three weeks after she was made a wife. By so much as she was happier than I, by so much was her joy briefer than mine."

She sank into a corner of the large armchair and covered her face with her hands, muttering to herself. He heard the words—"I made myself her Evil Destiny; I was her fate — Nemesis, Nemesis! The sins of the fathers! It is the Scripture."

He could not stay in the room with her after that confession. She had been perfectly coherent in telling the story of her crime; and it seemed to him that even now she gloated over the evil she had wrought—that had it been in her power to undo her work by the lifting of her hand she would hardly have used that power. She seemed a malignant spirit, rejoicing in evil.

He went out into the passage and told the policeman's wife to look after her, and then he went to the

desolate drawing-room and walked up and down the bare boards waiting for the arrival of one or both of the doctors.

What would *they* think of her mental condition. She had been curiously coherent just now. The temporary delusion had passed away like a cloud. She had spoken as a person fully conscious of her acts, and accountable for them. Judged by her speech just now she was a criminal who deserved the sternest measure of the law.

But he who knew of those long years of brooding, he who knew the story of her wrongs, and how those wrongs must have acted upon that proud and stubborn spirit, to him there seemed little doubt that her mind had long lost its balance, and that her crime had been the culminating crisis of a long period of melancholia. He waited the verdict of the doctors with acutest anxiety, for only in an asylum did he see safety for this unhappy sinner. The finding of the pistol would inevitably be talked about at Cherton, and it was possible that at any moment suspicion might take the right direction. To get her away, to get her hidden from the world was his most ardent desire; but this was not inconsistent

with his desire to spare her, to do the best that could be done for her. The thought that he had ruined her life—that his wrong-doing was at the root of all her miseries—was never absent from his mind.

Dr. Mainwaring was the first to arrive. He was a man of supreme refinement, gentle, compassionate, an artist by talent and temperament, intellectual to the tips of his fingers. He had made insanity and the care of the insane the work of his life, as his father and grandfather had done before him, and he enjoyed the privilege of having been born in an age of enlightenment, which they had not even foreseen in their happiest anticipations. He had met Lord Cheriton often in London society, and had visited him in the country, and they were as close friends as two busy men of the world can be.

He was mystified by so sudden a summons and to such a locality; but he had too much tact to betray any surprise. He listened quietly to Lord Cheriton's explanation that he was wanted to form an opinion of a dependent whose state of mind had given cause for uneasiness.

“ I will say very little about her till you have seen

her," said Cheriton. "If it should appear to you and to my friend Wilmot, whom I have asked to meet you,—if you should decide that she ought to be placed under restraint, I should wish her to be removed immediately to your house at Cheshunt. I know that she will be made as happy there as her state of mind will admit, and I shall rely upon your kind consideration for making this a special case."

"You may be assured I shall do my uttermost for anyone in whom you are interested, my dear Cheriton, but indeed I think you must know that I do my uttermost in every case. It is only in some small details that I can ever show special attention. Is this poor lady very violent?"

"No, she is very quiet."

"And there is no suicidal mania, I hope?"

"I have seen no evidence of it; but she left her home in a strange and motiveless manner this morning, and that, coupled with other indications in the past, gave me the alarm."

"Has she any delusions?"

"Yes, it was under a delusion that she came to this empty house. She lived here many years ago, and on talking to her just now I found her uncon-

scious of the lapse of time, and fancying that all things were still as they were when she was a young woman."

"Has she had any illness lately?"

"None that I know of."

"I fear there can be little doubt as to her malady. Will you take me to her? She will be less alarmed if you are with me. Oh, by the bye, the nurse you asked for will be here almost immediately."

"I am glad of that. There is only a wretched slattern in the house, whom I don't like to see in attendance upon my poor friend."

Lord Cheriton and the doctor went into the room, where Mrs. Porter was sitting facing the window, staring moodily at the trailing tendrils of Virginia creeper and passion-flower hanging from the roof of the verandah and shutting out the light. There was something unspeakably desolate in that glimpse of neglected garden seen athwart the neglected verdure, with the smoky London sky as a background.

She looked round quickly at the sound of footsteps, and started up from her chair.

“Who is this man?” she asked, turning to Lord Cheriton. “Are you going to send me to prison? You have lost no time.”

“This gentleman is my old friend, and he is interested in helping you if he can.”

“You had better leave us together,” said Dr. Mainwaring, gently.

Lord Cheriton left the room silently, and paced the narrow entrance hall, listening with intense anxiety to the low murmuring sound of voices on the other side of the door.

There were no loud tones from either speaker. There could be neither anger nor profound agitation upon Mrs. Porter’s side, the listener thought, as he awaited the result of the interview. A knock at the hall-door startled him from his expectancy, and he hastened to admit the new arrival.

It was his other medical friend, Dr. Wilmot, stout and jovial, more adapted to assist at a wedding than a funeral, more fitted to prescribe for wine-bibbing aldermen or dowagers who needed to be “kept up” on Roederer or Mumm, than to stand beside the bed of agony, or listening to the ravings of a mind distraught. Mainwaring came out

of the dining-room at the sound of voices in the hall.

“Ah, how do you do, Wilmot? You will have very little trouble in making up your mind about this poor soul. Go in and talk to her while I take a turn in the garden with his Lordship.”

He opened the dining-room door, and Dr. Wilmot passed in, smiling, agreeable, and beginning at once in an oily voice, “My dear lady, my friend Mainwaring suggests that I should have a little chat with you while—while Lord Cheriton and he are admiring the garden. A very nice garden, upon my word, for the immediate vicinity of London. One hardly expects such a nice bit of ground now-a-days. May I feel your pulse? Thanks, a little too rapid for perfect health.”

“What do you and that other man mean by all this pretence?” she exclaimed, indignantly. “I am not ill. Are you a doctor, or a policeman in disguise? If you want to take me to prison I am ready to go with you. I came to London on purpose to give myself up. You need not beat about the bush. I am ready.”

“Mad, very mad,” thought Dr. Wilmot, detain-

ing the unwilling wrist, and noting its tumultuous pulsations by the second hand of his professional watch.

Lord Cheriton and Dr. Mainwaring were pacing slowly up and down the moss-grown gravel while this was happening.

“How did you find her?”

“Curiously calm and collected for the first part of the interview. Had it not been for her troubled eye, and the nervous movements of her hands, I should have supposed her as sane as you or I. I talked to her of indifferent subjects, and her answers were consecutive and reasonable, although it was evident she resented my presence. It was only when I asked her why she had come to London that she became agitated and incoherent, and began to talk about having committed a murder, and wishing to give herself up and make a full confession of her guilt. Instead of waiting for the law to find her out she was going to find the law. She had no fear of the result. She had long been tired of her life, and she was not afraid of the disgrace of a felon's death. Her whole manner, as she said this showed a deep-rooted delusion, and I am of

opinion that her mind has been unhinged for a long time. That notion of an imaginary crime is often a fixed idea in lunacy. A madman will conceive a murder that never took place, or he will connect himself with some actual murder, and insist upon his guilt, often with an extraordinary appearance of truth and reality, until he is shaken by severe cross-examination."

"You will receive her in your house at once?"

"I have no objection, if Wilmot's opinion coincides with mine; but another medical man must sign the certificate if she is to enter my house. I have no doubt as to her being in a condition to require restraint. She is not violent at present, but if she is not taken care of she will go wandering about in search of a police-magistrate, and with increasing excitement there will be every likelihood of acute mania. Ah, here comes Wilmot. Well, what do you think of the case, Wilmot?"

"Mad, undeniably mad. She took me for a policeman, and raved about a murder for which she wanted to give herself up to justice."

"A fixed delusion, you see," said Mainwaring,

with a gentle sigh. "Do you know how long she has had this idea, Cheriton?"

"Indeed, I do not. Her position on my estate was a peculiar one. She lived at one of the lodges, but her status was not that of an ordinary dependent. She was her own mistress, and lived a very solitary life—after her daughter left her. I have sent for the daughter, who will be here presently, I hope. My first notice of anything amiss was a hint dropped by a young medical man who was visiting at Cheriton. He saw Mrs. Porter, and formed the opinion that she either had been off her head in the past, or was likely to go off her head in the future. That startled me, and I had it in my mind to ask you to come down to see her, Mainwaring, when there came the sudden departure of this morning—a departure which was so at variance with her former habits that it made me anxious for her safety. I followed her to London—first to her daughter's lodging—and then here—where by mere guesswork, I found her."

"Do you think that it may be the sad event of last year—the murder of your son-in-law—which has put this notion into her head?"

“It is not unlikely. That dreadful event made a profound impression upon everybody at Cheriton. She, being a reserved and thoughtful woman, may have brooded over it.”

“Until she grew to associate herself with the crime,” said Wilmot. “Nothing more likely. Was the murderer never found, by the way?”

“Never.”

“But there can be no suspicion against this lady, I conclude. She can have been in no way concerned in the crime?”

“I think you have only to look at her in order to be satisfied upon that point,” said Lord Cheriton; and the two physicians agreed that the poor lady in question was not of the criminal type, and that nothing was more common in the history of mental aberration than the hallucination to which she was a victim.

“Those monotonous lives of annuitants and genteel dependents—exempt from labour, and to the outward eye full of placid contentment, do not infrequently tend towards madness,” said Dr. Wilmot. “I have seen more than one such case as this. There are some minds that have no need

of action or variety, some natures which can vegetate in a harmless nullity. There are other tempers which prey upon themselves in solitude, and brood upon fancies till they lose touch of realities. This lady is of the latter type, highly organized, sensitive to a marked degree, of the *genus-irritabile*."

"You will take all necessary steps at once?" said Lord Cheriton, looking from one doctor to the other.

Both were consentient. Dr. Wilmot drove off at once to find the nearest medical man, and brought him back in his carriage. A very brief interview with the patient convinced this gentleman of the necessity for gentle restraint, and the certificate was signed by him and Dr. Wilmot.

It was six o'clock, and the shadows were deepening in the room where Mrs. Porter was sitting, quiescent, silent, in a kind of apathy from which she was scarcely roused by the entrance of the nurse from Cheshunt, a tall comely-looking woman of about thirty, neatly dressed, and with pleasant manners.

Mrs. Porter sat there in her dull lethargy, the

food that had been prepared for her untasted at her side. The nurse looked at the patient with a keen professional eye, and from the patient to the tray where an ill-cooked chop stagnated in a pool of grease ; and where the unused teacup showed that even the feminine refreshment of tea had failed to tempt her.

“She hasn’t eaten anything,” said the nurse, “and she looks weak and wasted, as if she had been for a long time without food. You’d better send for some beef essence and a little brandy. She ought to be kept up somehow, if she is to be taken to Cheshunt to-night. It will be a long drive.”

Lord Cheriton despatched the policeman’s wife to the nearest chemist’s and the nearest wine merchant’s, while he went himself to a livery stable and ordered a brougham and pair to be at Myrtle Cottage at seven o’clock. The certificate had been signed, and there was nothing to hinder the removal of the patient. He found Mercy with her mother upon his return, but the mother had given no sign of recognition, and the daughter sorrowfully acknowledged the necessity of the case after

Dr. Mainwaring had gently explained her mother's condition to her.

"I am not surprised," she said, with sad submission, "I saw it coming years ago. I have lain awake many a night when I was a girl listening to her footsteps as she walked up and down her bedroom, and to the heart-broken sigh that she gave every now and then, in the dead of the night, when she thought there was no one to hear her."

An hour later the woman who for twenty years had been known as Mrs. Porter, and who was to carry that name to her dying day, was on her way to The Grange, Cheshunt, with her daughter and the nurse in the carriage with her. She had made no resistance, had gone where she was asked to go, with an apathetic indifference, had given no trouble; but although her daughter had been with her for an hour, doing all that tender attention could do to awaken her memory, there had been not a word or a look from the mother to betoken consciousness of her existence.

Yet it was clear that the mental powers were only clouded, not extinguished; for, as Lord Cheriton

stood a little way outside the porch watching her as she passed out to the carriage, she stopped suddenly and looked at him.

“Will you and I ever meet again, James Dalbrook?” she asked solemnly.

He paled at the address in those clear, incisive tones, dreading what she might say next.

“I think it may be better we should not meet,” he said gloomily. “I have placed you in the care of those who will do the best that can be done for you.”

“You are sending me to a madhouse, in the care of a mad doctor. That is your substitute for Cheriton Chase; the home I used to dream about ages ago, in this house; the home you and I were to have shared as man and wife. It was my birth-place, James, and I would to God it had been my grave before I ever looked upon your face!”

The nurse hustled her charge into the carriage, muttering something about “delusions”; but Dr. Mainwaring was too shrewd a student of humanity not to perceive some meaning in these consecutive utterances. He had no doubt that Mrs. Porter was deranged, and a person who would be the better for

the moderate restraint of a well-ordered asylum : but he had also no doubt that she had her lucid intervals, and that in this farewell speech she had let in the light upon her past relations with James Dalbrook, first Baron Cheriton.

That revelation accounted for some points in the law-lord's conduct which had hitherto been incomprehensible to his friend the doctor.

CHAPTER XV.

“ Mine after-life ! what is mine after-life ?
My day is closed ! the gloom of night is come !
A hopeless darkness settles o’er my fate ! ”

It seemed to Lord Cheriton as he drove to Victoria Street in Dr. Mainwaring’s brougham, that the day which had just come to an end had been the longest day of his life. He looked back at the sunny morning hour in which he had lingered over the business of the toilet, brooding upon that discovery of the pistol, his spirits weighed down by a vague foreboding, a dim horror of approaching evil, scarcely able to measure the extent of his own fears. He recalled the moment at which his valet brought him Theodore’s brief summons to the West Lodge—a moment that had given new reality to all he dreaded—a summons which told him that the shadowy horror which had been beside his pillow all

through the night was going to take a tangible shape. Oh, God, how long it seemed since that pencilled line was put into his hand—since he stood in the blinding sunshine staring at the curt summons—before he recovered himself so far as to turn to his servant with his habitual grave authority, and give some trivial order about his overcoat.

Since then what slow agonies of apprehension—what self-abasement before the daughter whom he met for the first time as his daughter, face to face! What terror lest the woman whom his perfidy had driven to madness and to crime should be called upon to answer to the law for that crime—while England should ring with the story of *his* treachery, and *his* hidden sin! He felt as if he had lived through half a life-time of shame and agony between the vivid light of the August morning and the cool grey shadows of the August night. He leant back in his corner of the cosy little brougham, pale and dumb, a worn-out man, and his friend the physician respected his silence.

“Will you come home and dine with me, Cheriton?” said Dr. Mainwaring, as they crossed the

bridge. "It may be pleasanter for you than the solitude of your own rooms."

"You are very good. No, I am not fit for society, not even for yours. I am deeply indebted to you—I feel that you are indeed my friend—and that you will do all that can be done to make that broken life yonder endurable."

"You may be sure of that. I would do as much were Mrs. Porter a nameless waif whom I had found by the road side; but as your friend she will have an unceasing interest for me. Shall you stay long enough in town to be able to spare time to go and see her at the Grange?"

"No, I must go back to Dorsetshire to-morrow. I doubt if I shall ever see her again. Accept that fact as the strongest proof of my confidence in you. Had I any doubt as to her treatment I would see her from time to time, at whatever cost of pain to myself."

"There is nothing but pain, then, in your present feeling about that poor lady?"

"Nothing but pain."

"And yet—forgive me if I touch an old wound—I think you must once have loved her?"

The shadows were deepening, the lamps shone with faint yellow light upon the grey stone parapet, and the interior of the carriage was very dark. Perhaps it was the darkness which emboldened Dr. Mainwaring to push his inquiry to this point.

“You are right,” his friend answered slowly. “I loved her once.”

The brougham stopped at his lordship’s door in Victoria Street, and then drove northwards with the physician. There was time for much serious reflection between Westminster and Welbeck Street.

“My new patient must be carefully looked after,” mused the doctor, “for I’m afraid there’s more meaning in her self-accusation than there generally is in such cases, and that Sir Godfrey Carmichael’s murderer is now in my keeping.”

The long August day passed very quietly at Milbrook Priory. Lady Cheriton arrived in the afternoon, and the three generations spent the summer hours on the lawn, mother and daughter sitting at work under the tulip trees, grandson and nurse in

that state of perpetual motion which is infancy's only alternative with perpetual slumber.

Theodore spent his afternoon in a somewhat restless fashion, and appeared as if possessed by a rage for locomotion. He rambled about the grounds, explored the shrubberies, and every yard of the plantation that girdled the little park. He went to both lodges, and talked to the caretaker at each. He made two different excursions to the village, on pretence of making inquiries at the Post Office, but in reality with the idea of meeting with, or hearing of, Mrs. Porter, should she have wandered that way. He behaved like a member of the secret police who had been charged with the guardianship of the most precious life in the land; and if his movements betrayed the nervous anxiety of the amateur, rather than the business-like tranquillity of the professional, he made up in earnestness for what he lacked in training and experience.

It was on his return from his second sauntering perambulation of the village that he found Lord Cheriton's telegram waiting for him at the Priory. The relief that message brought was unspeakable, and his countenance showed the change in

his feelings when he rejoined the two ladies on the lawn.

“Something very pleasant must have happened to you, Theodore,” said Juanita. “You have been looking the picture of gloom all day, and now you are suddenly radiant. Have you been talking to one of the Vicar’s pretty daughters?”

“No, Juanita; neither of those wax-doll beauties glorified my path. I heard their treble voices on the other side of the holly-hedge as I passed the Vicarage, and I’m afraid they were quarrelling. I have had good news from London.”

“From my father?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, Theodore, why do you torture me by hiding things from me? Something has happened, I know.”

“You will know all in a few days, Juanita. Thank God, a great fear that has haunted me for some time past is now at an end. I can look at you and your child without seeing the shadow of an enemy across your path.”

She looked at him searchingly.

“All this amounts to nothing,” she said. “

have never feared for myself or thought of myself. Will my husband's death be avenged, and soon, soon, soon? That is the question."

"That is a question which you yourself may be called upon to answer — and very soon," he said.

He would say no more, in spite of her feverish eagerness, her impatient questionings.

"I have changed my mind, Juanita," he said presently. "I will not bore you with my company till I am free to answer your questions. The motive for my presence in this house is at an end.

"Is it? What has become of the suspicious characters my father talked about?"

"The danger has not come this way—as he feared it might."

"Stay," she said. "Whether there is danger or not you are going to stay. I will not be played fast and loose with by any visitor. Mother likes to have you here, and baby likes you."

"Not so well as he likes Cuthbert Ramsay," retorted Theodore, with almost involuntary bitterness.

This time Juanita's blush was an obvious fact.

She walked away from her cousin indignantly.

"You may go or stay, as you please," she said; and he stayed, stayed to be a footstool under her feet if she liked—stayed with a heart gnawed by jealousy, consumed by despair.

"It is useless—hopeless beyond the common measure of hopelessness," he told himself. "She never cared for me in the past, and she will never care for me in the future. I am doomed to stand for ever upon the same dull plane of affectionate indifference. If I were dangerously ill she would nurse me; if I were in difficulties she would load me with benefits; if I were dead she would be sorry for me; but she is fonder of Ramsay, whom she has seen half-a-dozen times in her life, than she will ever be of me."

Lord Cheriton returned to Dorsetshire on the following afternoon. He drove from Wareham to the Priory, and had a long *tête-à-tête* with Theodore in the garden before dinner.

"You have acted for my daughter throughout

this miserable business," he said, when he had told all that was to be told about Mrs. Porter's seclusion at Cheshunt. "She has confided in you more completely even than in me—her father, and I leave my cause in your hands. You must plead to the daughter for the erring father, whose sin has exercised a fatal influence upon her life. Win her forgiveness for me—win her pity for that most unhappy woman, if you can. It is a difficult task which I entrust to you, Theodore, but I believe in your power to move that generous heart to mercy."

"You may believe in my devotion to you both," said Theodore, and Lord Cheriton left the Priory without seeing his wife and daughter, who had gone to dress for dinner just before his arrival, and who came to the drawing-room presently, both expecting to find him there.

Theodore explained his hasty departure as best he might.

"Your father drove over to speak to me upon a matter of business," he said to Juanita. "He was tired after his journey, and preferred going home to dine."

“He was not ill, I hope?” cried Lady Cheriton, with a look of alarm.

“No, there is nothing amiss with him, except fatigue.”

Juanita looked at him intently, eager to question him, but the butler’s entrance to announce dinner stopped her, and she told Theodore to give his arm to her mother, and followed them both to the dining-room.

The meal was a mockery as far as two out of the three were concerned. Juanita was nervous and ill at ease, impatient of the lengthy ceremonial. Theodore ate hardly anything, but kept up a slipshod conversation with Lady Cheriton, talked about the grandchild’s abnormal intelligence, and assured her in reply to her reiterated inquiries that her husband was not ill, was not even looking ill, and that there was no reason for her to go back to the Chase that night, as she was disposed to do.

Juanita rose abruptly before the grapes and peaches had been taken round.

“Would you mind coming to my room at once, Theodore?” she said. “I want half-an-hour’s talk

with you about—business. You will excuse my leaving you, won't you, mother?"

"My dear child, I shall be glad to get half-an-hour in the nursery. Boyle tells me that little rascal is never so lively as just before he settles down for the night."

Lady Cheriton went off in one direction, Juanita and Theodore in the other.

The lamp was lighted in the study, on the table where two rows of books told of the widow's studious solitude.

Theodore glanced at the titles of those neatly-arranged volumes and saw that they were mostly upon scientific subjects.

"I did not know that you were fond of science, Juanita?" he said.

"I am not. I used to hate it. I am as ignorant as a baby. I don't believe I know any more about the moon than Juliet did when she accused it of inconstancy. Only when one comes to my age one ought to improve oneself. Godfrey will be asking me questions before I am much older — and when he wants to know whether the earth goes round the sun or the sun

round the earth, I must be prepared to answer him."

She spoke with a nervous air, facing him in the soft clear lamp-light, her hand upon the row of books, her eyes eager and questioning.

"You have seen my father, Theodore. Is the embargo removed?"

"It is."

"And you know who murdered my husband?"

"So far as the assassin's own confession is to be believed, yes."

"He has confessed—he is in prison—he will be hanged," she cried breathlessly.

"The murderer has confessed—but is not in prison—and will not be hanged—at least I trust not, in God's mercy."

"You are full of pity for a murderer, Theodore," she cried bitterly. "Have you no pity for my husband? Is his death to go unpunished? Is his life—the life that might have been as long as it was happy—is that to count for nothing?"

“It is to count for much, Juanita. Believe me, your husband is avenged. His death was a sacrifice to a broken heart and a disordered brain. The hand that killed him is the hand of one who cannot be called to account—the hand of a mad-woman.”

“A woman?”

“Yes, a woman. The woman you have seen many a time as you passed in and out of Cheriton Chase in your father’s carriage by the West Gate.”

“Mrs. Porter?”

“Yes.”

“Great God! why did she kill my husband?”

“Because she was unhappy—because she had suffered until sorrow had obscured her intellect, till her life had become one long thirst to do evil — one hatred of youth and beauty, and innocent gladness like yours. She saw you in your wedded happiness, and she thought of a happiness which was once her own day dream — the hope and dream of patient, self-denying years. She struck at you through your

husband. She struck at your father through you."

"My father! What was he to her—ever, except a friend and benefactor?"

"He was once more than that to Evelyn Strangway."

"Strangway!" shrieked Juanita, clasping her hands. "Did I not tell you so from the first? It was the footstep of a Strangway that crept past our window, while we sat together in our happiness, without thought of peril. It was a Strangway who killed my husband. You told me that they were all dead and gone—that the race was extinct—that the people I feared were phantoms. I told you it was a Strangway who fired that shot, and you see my instinct was truer than your reason—and there was a Strangway at our gates—disguised—under a false name—looking at us with smooth, hypocritical smiles—nursing her wrath to keep it warm."

"Unhappily your instinct hit upon the fatal truth. The hatred of the Strangways was not dead. One member of that family survived, and cherished a more than common malignity

against the race that had blotted out the old name."

"But my father, how had he provoked her hatred?"

"He once loved her, Juanita—many years ago—before he saw your mother's face. Evelyn Strangway and he had been lovers—pledged to each other by a solemn promise. As a man of honour he should have kept that promise; there were stringent reasons that bound him. But he saw your mother and loved her, and broke with Evelyn Strangway—openly, with no unmanly deceit; but still there was the broken promise, and that involved a deep wrong. He believed that wrong forgiven. He believed the more in her pardon because it was her earnest desire to live unrecognised and unnoticed upon the estate where she was born. He could not fathom the depth of hatred in that warped nature. He did all that there was left to him to do—having taken his own course and entered upon a new and fairer life with the woman he loved—to make amends to the woman he had deserted. He never suspected the depth of her feelings—he never suspected the seeds of madness, with its ever present dangers. He did

what in him lay to atone for the sin of his youth ; but that sin found him out, and it was his bitter lot to see his beloved daughter the innocent victim of his wrong-doing. He trusted me to tell you this miserable story, Juanita. He humbles himself in the dust before you, stricken at the thought of your suffering. He appeals through me to your love and to your pity. How am I to answer him when I answer for you ? ”

She was silent for some moments after he had asked this final question, her eyes fixed, her chest heaving with the stormy beating of her heart.

“ What has become of this woman—this pitiless devil ? ” she gasped.

“ She is in a madhouse.”

“ Is no punishment to overtake her ? Is she not to be tried for her life ? Let them prove her mad, or let them find her guilty, and hang her—hang her—hang her. Her life for his, her worn-out remnant of wretched, disappointed days for his bright young life, with all its promise and all its hope.”

“ It would be a poor revenge, Juanita, to take so poor a life. This unhappy woman is under restraint that will, in all probability, last till the day of her death. Her crime is known only to your father and to me. Were it to become known to others she would have to stand in the dock, and then the whole story would have to be told—the story of your father’s broken promise—of this woman’s youth, bound so closely with his that to many it would seem almost as if they stood side by side at the bar. Do you think that the fierce rapture of revenge could ever atone to you for having brought dishonour upon your father’s declining years, Juanita ? ”

“ And my husband’s death is to go unavenged ? ”

“ Do you think there is no retribution in the slow agony of a shattered mind—the long blank days of old age in a lunatic asylum, the apathy of a half-extinguished intellect varied by flashes of bitter memory. God help and pity such a criminal, for her punishment must be heavier than hemp and quicklime.”

She seemed scarcely to hear him. She was walk-

ing up and down the room, her hands clenched, her brows contracted over the fixed eyes.

“I caught just one glimpse of her as we drove past ; but that glimpse ought to have been enough,” she said. “I can see her face as we passed the lodge, looking out at us from the parlour window, within a few hours of my darling’s death—a pale vindictive face—yes, vindictive. I ought to have understood ; I ought to have taken warning, and guarded my beloved one from her murderous hate.”

“What am I to say to your father, Juanita ? I ought not to leave him long in doubt. Think what it is for a father to humiliate himself before his daughter—to sue for pardon.”

“Oh, but he must not do that. I have nothing to forgive. How could he understand that there could be such diabolical malignity in any human breast ? How could he think that the wrong done by him would be revenged upon that innocent head ? Oh, if she had gone a nearer way to revenge herself—if she had killed me, rather than him. It is such bitterness to know that my love brought him untimely death—that he might have been here now,

happy, with long years of honour and content before him if he had chosen any other wife.”

“It is hopeless to think of what might have been, Nita. Your husband was happy in your love—and not unhappy in his death. Such a fate is far better than the dull and slow decay which closes many a fortunate life—the inch by inch dissolution of a protracted old age—the gradual extinction of mind and feeling—the apathetic end. You must not talk as if your husband’s death was the extremity of misfortune.”

“It was—for me. Can I forget what it was to lose him? Oh, there is no use in talking of my loss. I wanted to avenge his death. I have lived for that—and I am cheated of even that poor comfort.”

“What shall I say to your father?”

“Say that I will do nothing to injure him—or to distress my mother. I will remember that I am their daughter, as well as Godfrey’s widow. Good night, Theodore. You have done your uttermost to help me. We cannot help it, either of us, if Fate was against us.”

She gave him her hand, very cold, but with the

firm grasp of friendship. The very touch of that hand told him he would never be more to her than a friend. Not so is a woman's hand given when the impassioned heart goes with it.

CHAPTER XVI.

“A malady

Preys on my heart that medicine cannot reach,
Invisible and cureless.”

MRS. PORTER'S evanishment created considerable talk in the little village of Cheriton, and would doubtless have been the occasion of still greater wonder but for the impenetrable stupidity of the young maidservant, from whom no detailed account of her mistress's departure could be extorted. Had the girl Phœbe been observant and loquacious she might have stimulated public curiosity by a lively narrative of events; setting forth Theodore Dalbrook's emotion at finding the lodge deserted; and how he had sent up to the house for his Lordship; and how his Lordship and Mr. Dalbrook had remained in earnest conversation for nearly an hour in the lodge parlour; and how Mrs. Porter had left a

mahogany box upon the table, a flat mahogany box with brass corners, which Phœbe had never seen before; and how this very box had disappeared mysteriously when the two gentlemen left. All this would have afforded mental pabulum for the acuter wits of the village, and would have formed the nucleus of an interesting scandal, to be uttered with bated breath over the humble tea-tray, and to give zest to the unassuming muffin in the back parlours of small rustic shopkeepers. As it was, thanks to Phœbe's admirable stolidity, all that was known of Mrs. Porter's departure was that she had gone to London by the early train on a certain morning, and that her luggage had been sent after her, address unknown.

It was the general opinion that Mrs. Porter had had money left her, and that she had reassumed her position in life as a genteel personage. This afforded some scope for speculative gossip, but not for a wide range of conjecture, and in less than a month after Mrs. Porter's departure the only talk in relation to the West Lodge was the talk of who would succeed the vanished lady as its occupant.

This thrilling question was promptly settled by the removal of the head gardener and his wife from their very commonplace abode in the village to the old English cottage.

Cheriton was furnished with a more interesting topic of discourse before the end of October, when it was "given out" that Lord and Lady Cheriton were going to winter abroad, an announcement which struck consternation to a village in which the great house was the centre of light and leading, and the chief consumer of butcher's meat, farm produce—over and above the supply from the home-farm—and expensive groceries; not to mention hardware, kitchen crockery, coals, saddlery, forage, and odds and ends of all kinds. To shut up Cheriton Chase for six months was to paralyse trade in Cheriton.

To draw down the blinds and close the shutters of the great house was to spread a gloom over the best society in the neighbourhood, and to curtail the weekly offertory by about one-third.

Everybody admitted, however, that his Lordship had been looking ill of late. He had aged suddenly,

“as those fine, well set-up men are apt to do,” said Mr. Dolby, the doctor. He looked care-worn and haggard. The village solicitor hoped that he had not been dabbling with foreign loans—or had invested blindly in the fortune of an impossible canal—yet opined that nothing but the Stock Exchange could make such a sudden change for the worse in any man. Mr. Dolby declared that Lord Cheriton’s lungs were as sound as a bell, and that if he were ordered abroad it was not on account of his chest.

Everybody pitied her Ladyship, and talked of her as despondingly as if it had been proposed to take her to Botany Bay in the days of transportation for felony. It was so cruel to separate her from her flower-gardens, her hothouses, her poultry-yard, and her daughter; for all which things a correct British matron was supposed to exist. To take her from these placid domestic pleasures, from these strictly lady-like interests, and to plunge her in a hotbed of vice such as Monte Carlo—as pictured by the rustic mind—would be a kind of moral murder. Cheriton recovered its equanimity somewhat upon hearing

that his Lordship was going to winter at Mustapha Supérieure—but it was opined that even there baccarat and Parisian morals would be in the ascendant, and a photograph of a square in Algiers, which looked like a bit broken off the Rue de Rivoli, was by no means reassuring.

Yet, whatever Dr. Dolby might say as to the soundness of his lungs, there remained the fact that his Lordship had altered for the worse since the shooting season began. He who used to go out daily with the guns, had this year not gone with them half-a-dozen times in the whole season. He whose active habits and personal superintendence of his estate had been the admiration of his neighbours had taken to staying at home, dreaming over Horace or Juvenal in the library.

Yes, Lord Cheriton was a broken man. From the hour in which his daughter had laid her head upon his breast, and sobbed out fond words of compassion and forgiveness for the weakness and the sin that had brought about her one great sorrow—from that hour James Dalbrook's zest of life dwindled, and the things that he had cared for pleased him no more. His

heart sickened as he rode his cob by the familiar lanes, and surveyed wide-spreading corn-field and undulating pasture—sickened at the thought of that wretched creature whose dream he had darkened, whose long-cherished hope he had ruthlessly disappointed. The image of Evelyn Darcy, eating out her heart in the dull monotony of a private mad-house, came between him and that sunlit prospect, haunted and tortured him wherever he turned his eye. He had to give up the quiet morning rides which had once been the most restful portion of the day, his thinking hours, his time for leisurely discursive meditations, for indulgence in happy thoughts and humorous reverie.

His wife saw the change in him—knowing nothing of the cause—and urged him to take advice. He gratified her by seeing Sir William Jenner, confessed to being fagged and out of spirits, and obtained just the advice he wanted—complete change of scene—a winter in Egypt or Algiers.

“We’ll try Algiers first, and if we don’t like it we can try the Nile,” he said, and his wife, who would have gone to Vancouver Island or Patagonia

just as cheerfully, forthwith ordered her trunks to be packed, and began to take leave of her grandson, an operation which would require weeks.

They left England in the middle of November, just when the last leaves were being stripped from the oaks and beeches by the blustering south-west wind, which is a speciality in that part of the country, where it comes salt with the bitter breath of the sea, and sometimes thick and gray with sea fog.

Mrs. Porter had been nearly three months at Cheshunt Grange, and Theodore had been three times to see her in that carefully-chosen retreat, and on two of those visits had met her daughter Mercy, who went to her twice a week.

He had found Dr. Mainwaring's patient strangely calm and tractable, professing herself contented with her life, and having established her reputation among the other patients as a lady of blameless character and reserved manners.

"I sometimes wonder how they would feel if they knew what I did that night," she said to Theodore once, with a sinister smile. "They think me a

common-place person. They call my complaint nervous debility. Nobody here would believe me if I were to tell them that I murdered a man who never offended me by so much as an uncivil word. They don't believe that such a deed as that would be possible in our day, and in our country. They think it was only a couple of centuries ago in Southern Europe that women knew the meaning of revenge."

This was the solitary occasion on which she spoke of her crime. On the other visits he found her apathetic. Although she was elaborately polite, it was evident that she did not recognise him. She had, however, recognised her daughter, and now received her with some faint show of tenderness, but not without a touch of fretful impatience. It was evident that Mercy's presence gave her no pleasure.

"I go to see her as often as Dr. Mainwaring allows me," Mercy told Theodore, as they walked to the station together. "It is all I can do—and it is very little."

"Have you thought any more of Lord Cheriton's earnest desire to improve your position? Have you

learnt to take pity upon him, to think more kindly of him, on account of all he has suffered ? ”

“ I am very sorry for him—but I can never accept any favour at his hands. I can never forget what my mother’s life has been like, and who made her what she is.”

“ And is your own life to be always the same—a monotony of toil ? ”

“ I am used to such a life—but I have some thought of a change in my employment. I had a long talk with your friend Mr. Ramsay last night at Miss Newton’s, and through his help I hope to learn to be a sick-nurse. I should be of more use to my fellow-creatures in that capacity than in stitching at fine needlework for rich people’s children.”

“ It would be a hard life, Mercy.”

“ I am content to live a hard life. I had my span of a soft life—a life of idleness on a summer sea, amidst the loveliest spots upon earth—a life that would have been like a glimpse of Heaven itself, if it had not been for the consciousness of sin and disgrace. Do you think I forget those days on

the Mediterranean, or forget that I have to atone for them? The man I loved is dead—all that belonged to that life has vanished like a dream.”

They parted at the railway station, she to go to her place in a dusty third-class carriage, he to a smoking carriage to smoke the meditative pipe, and think sadly of those two blighted lives which had been ground beneath the wheels of Lord Cheriton's triumphal car.

Cheriton Chase was deserted, the blinds down, the servants on board wages, the flower-beds empty and raked over for the winter; but at Milbrook Priory all was life and movement. The sisters and their husbands were again established in their favourite rooms. Lady Jane was again at hand to assist her daughter-in-law to bear the burden of a family party, and all was much as it had been in the previous winter, except that Juanita had a new interest in life, and was able to take pleasure in many things that had been an oppression to her spirits last year.

Most of all were her feelings altered towards Mrs. Grenville and her nursery. She was now warmly

interested in the history of Johnnie's measles, and deeply sympathetic about that constitutional tendency towards swollen tonsils which was dear little Lucy's "weak point." For must not her Godfrey inevitably face the ordeal of measles, and might not his tonsils show a like weakness at the growing age? All those discussions about nursery dinners—the children who fed well and the children who fed badly—those who liked milk puddings and those who could not be induced to touch them—the advisability of a basin of cornflour or bread-and-milk at bedtime, the murderous influence of buns and pastry, and the lurking dangers of innocent-seeming jam—all these things, to hear of which last year bored her almost to exasperation, were now vital and spirit-moving questions.

The little visitors' nurseries were near the infant Sir Godfrey's rooms, and it was a delight to find the baby taking pleasure in his youthful cousins' society, and revelling in their noise. His own young lungs revealed their power and scope as they had never done before, and led the infant orchestra. Juanita spent hours in this noisy society, sitting on the floor

to be crawled over by her son—who was just beginning to discover the possibility of independent locomotion—and to have her hair pulled affectionately by the younger Grenvilles, who found her the most accommodating playfellow. She insisted that the children should dine at the family luncheon table, much to the gratification of their mother and grandmother, and to the exasperation of Mrs. Morningside, who, having left her own children with their conscientious governess and nurses, in the North of England, did not see why her mid-day meal should be made intolerable by the boisterous egotism of her nephews and nieces.

This was the condition of things at Christmas when Theodore reappeared at the Priory, having come to Dorchester for his holidays, after three months' earnest work. He had been reading with a man of some distinction at the Chancery Bar, and he had been writing for one of the Law Journals. He was struck by the change in his cousin. She looked younger, brighter, and happier than she had ever looked since her husband's death. No one could accuse her of having forgotten him, of having

grown indifferent to his memory, for at the least allusion which recalled his image her expression clouded, and her eyes grew sad. But there could be no doubt that the dawn of a happier existence was beginning to disperse the darkness of her night of grief. The influence of her child had done much ; the solution of the mystery of her husband's death had done more to relieve her mind of its burden. She was no longer tortured by wonder ; her thoughts were no longer forced to travel perpetually along the same groove. She knew the worst, and pity for her father prompted her to try to forget the wretch who had blighted her young life.

She received Theodore with all her old kindness, with that easy cordiality which was of all indications the most hopeless for the man who loved her. She took him to the nurseries, where Christmas fires blazed merrily, and Christmas gifts strewed the carpet, a plethora of toys, a litter of foil paper and gold and silver fringe, and tissue-paper cocked hats and Pierrot caps, from the wreck of cracker bonbons. The children were masters of the situation in this Christmas week.

“It is *their* season,” said Juanita tenderly. “I don’t think we can ever do too much to make our children happy at this time, remembering that He who made the season sacred was once a little child.”

She took her baby up in her arms as she spoke, and pressed the little face lovingly against her own.

“Why does Mr. Ramsay never come to see me?” she asked with a sudden lightness of tone. “He used to be so fond of baby.”

“He is working hard at the hospital.”

“And is he not to have any holiday with you?”

“I fear not.”

Her manner in making the inquiry, light as it was, told him so much; and he noticed how she bent her face over the child’s flaxen head as she talked of Ramsay.

“Why does he work so hard?” she asked, after a silence.

“He has never given me any reason, yet I have my own idea about his motive.”

“And what is your idea?”

“Have you ever heard of a man trying to live down a hopeless attachment—trying to medicine a

mind diseased with the strong physic of intellectual labour. That is *my* case, Juanita; and I am inclined to think that it may be Ramsay's case too. He has altered curiously within the last few months. I cannot get so near his inner-self as I used to get; but I know him well enough to form a shrewd opinion."

"I am sorry for you both," she said, with a little nervous laugh, still hiding her face against the baby's incipient curls and wrinkled pink skin. "I am sorry you should be so sentimental."

"Sentimental, Nita! Is it sentimental to cherish one love for the best part of a lifetime, knowing that love to be hopeless all the time? If that is your idea of sentimentality, I confess myself sentimental. I have loved you ever since I knew the meaning of the word love—and I have gone on loving you in spite of every discouragement. I loved you when your love was given to another. Yes, I stood aside and harboured not one malevolent thought against the man you had so blest and honoured. I have loved you in your sorrow, as I loved you years ago in your light-hearted girlhood. I shall love you till

I am dust ; but I know that my love is hopeless. Your very kindness—in its level uniformity of sweetness—has told me that.”

“ Dear Theodore, if you knew how I value you—how I admire and respect you—I think you would be content to accept my sisterly regard,” she said, looking up at him with tearful eyes. “ Perhaps, had we met differently, as strangers, I might have felt differently—but from my earliest remembrance you have been to me as a friend and brother. I cannot teach myself any other love.”

“ Ah, Nita, that other love comes untaught. You want no teaching to love Cuthbert Ramsay. Don’t be angry ! I can’t help speaking of that which has been in my mind so long. I saw my doom in your face when Cuthbert was here. I saw that he could interest you as I had never interested you. I saw that he brought fresh thoughts and fancies into your life. I saw that he could conquer where I was beaten.”

“ You have no right to say that.”

“ I have the right that goes with conviction, Juanita, and with disinterested love. I have the right of my loyal friendship for the man who has

shown himself loyal to me. Unless you or I make some sign to prevent him, Cuthbert Ramsay will have made himself an exile from this country before the new year is a month old."

"What do you mean, Theodore?"

"I mean that he is in treaty with the leader of a scientific expedition to the Antarctic Ocean. The ships will be away three years, and if he join that expedition as doctor he will be absent for that time, with the usual hazard of being absent for ever."

"Why is he going?"

"He has never given me any reason, but I suspect that the reason is——you."

"Theodore!"

"If I read his secret right, he left this place deeply in love with you. He knew I loved you, and that was one reason for a man of his generous temper to withdraw. You are rich and he is poor, that makes another reason. He is too honourable to come between his friend and his friend's love. He is too proud to offer himself with only his talents and his unfulfilled ambition to a woman of fortune.

So he takes his old mistress Science for his comforter, and is going to the other side of the world to watch the planets in the Polar skies, and to keep the crew free of fever and scurvy, if he can."

"Three years," faltered Juanita. "It would not be so very long anywhere else—but those Polar expeditions so often end in deaths."

"Shall I tell him not to go?"

"Pray do."

"I'm afraid I shall hardly prevail with him, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you will let me say that you wish him to stay."

She blushed deepest crimson, and again had resource to the baby's pink little head as a hiding-place for her confusion.

"Tell him anything you like. Ask him to come and romp with the children next Easter. He is fond of children, and I am sure he would like my nephews and nieces. Ah Theodore," she cried, holding out her hand, "now you are indeed my brother. Forget that you ever wished to be more, and let

me hear of your having found a new love by-and-by."

"By-and-by is easily said, Juanita."

What would that by-and-by have revealed could the curtain of the Future have been lifted that Christmas Eve, as the children danced in the shadowy room while their elders sat beside the fire in the winter dusk? A coffin brought by land and sea, and laid with stately ceremonial in the cemetery at Dorchester. A respectful obituary notice of Lord Cheriton, with a laudatory biography, setting forth his remarkable gifts and his honourable career: much wonderment among his Lordship's friends at the premature termination of that prosperous life—a man of sixty who had looked ten years younger, and whose vigorous constitution and grand bearing had denoted one of the semi-immortals—a Brougham, a Lyndhurst, or a St. Leonards.

What else? A lovely matron, proud of her handsome Scotch husband and his scientific successes, reigning over one of the most delightful

houses in London, a house in which the brightest lights of the intellectual world are to be found shining in a congenial atmosphere. Sir Godfrey Carmichael's widow, now Cuthbert Ramsay's wife, and one of the leaders in all movements that tend towards the welfare and enlightenment of mankind.

What else? A rising barrister, living quietly in a secluded old house at Chiswick, with a sweet serious-looking wife, and two lovely babies, supremely contented with his lot and with his home, which is managed for him with that perfection of art which conceals art. His wife and he are of exactly the same age, have the same deep love of good books, good pictures, and good music, and the same indifference to frivolous pleasures and fashionable amusements. They have a few friends, carefully chosen, and of choicest quality, and amongst the most honoured of these is Sarah Newton, still brisk and active, though her abundant hair is snow white, and there are the deep lines of age about her shrewd and kindly eyes. They have their garden with its old cedars, and old walls shutting off the world of gig-and-villa respectability. They have their boat-

house and boats, in which they live for the most part on summer evenings, and they have hardly anything left to wish for—except a lock and weir.

The barrister is Theodore Dalbrook, and his wife's name is Mercy.

He found her four years ago established as nurse at Cheshunt Grange, administering to her mother till the day of her death, which happened by a strange fatality within a few hours of that other death in Algiers, a sudden death by cerebral apoplexy, swift as a thunder-clap. He found her there, and saw her frequently in his duty visits to the Asylum—visits paid in performance of a promise to his unhappy kinsman—and little by little that sympathy which he had felt for her in the first hour of their acquaintance warmed and ripened into love, and in Mercy, the woman who had sinned and paid the bitter penalty of sin, he found the consoling angel of his disappointed youth.

The world knows nothing of her story. That dead past is buried deeper than ever ship went down into the treacherous waters of the tideless sea. To Mercy herself, in her plenitude of domestic bliss, it seems

as if it was another woman who shed those bitter tears and drank that cup of shame. The world knows only that Theodore Dalbrook has a lovely and devoted wife, who thoroughly understands and realises the duties of her position.

Lord Cheriton's will, executed three months before his death at Mustapha Supérieure, bequeathed a life interest in the sum of £20,000 Consols to Sarah Newton, spinster, the principal to go to Mercy Darcy—otherwise Mercy Porter—upon that lady's death.

THE END.



